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Will Somers, THE BOY DETECTIVE.

BY CHARLES MORIIS.

CHAPTER I. LOOKING FOR WORK.

"Got any opening in these diggin's for a feller of my size and good looks?"

The speaker was a boy of some sixteen years of age, a well-built, athletic lad, the sinewy development of his limbs showing through more than one rent in his well-worn clothes.

His claim to good looks was indisputable. A bright black eye gave character to a face of classical outline, straggling curls of dark hair hanging low over his olive-hued cheeks and brow, while his nose and mouth had all the fine curves of the Grecian type.

But this countenance was none too clean, and its main expression was of the sauciest impudence, and a spirit of unbounded self-assertion.

"What do you want?" asked the gentleman addressed, in a curt tone.

"Well, I ain't partik'lar," drawled the boy. "I want a job. Most anything will do. Say cashier, or head clerk."

The merchant twisted himself round in his chair and looked at the speaker. The latter bore his sharp look unabashed, standing in an erect, easy attitude.

"Suppose I don't want a cashier?"

"Maybe then you'd give me a job to make fires and run errands. It's all one to me, so it pays."

"Who told you I wanted boy?"

"A counter-jumper outside there. I axed him if there was room in this row for a smart young man, and he said he guessed you wanted a partner. So I just stepped back to see if I wouldn't suit."

A frown came upon the merchant's brow as he heard of this impudent action of some one of his clerks.

"Who told you this?" he sharply asked.

"Now look ye here, mister," said the boy, impressively; "that's not my lay. I don't tell tales out of school. I wouldn't blow on a cat if I caught her stealing a mouse in another man's kitchen."

"Get out of here then. I am busy and don't want to be bothered."

"See here now," said the boy, leisurely seating himself in a chair. "You're not sayin' nothing about that job. You've got a dozen men out there in the store, and I don't see a boy in the shanty. Now you can't run a place like this without a wide-awake boy, and I'm jest the feller you want."

"You have impudence enough to run it yourself," said the merchant, looking more closely at his impudent visitor.

"Wouldn't be afraid to try," said the boy, saucily, putting to his lips a half-smoked cigar which he had all this time held in his hand, and taking a long whiff. "I've a notion I could make dry-goods spin amazing. Jest hand me the reins and I bet I put her through at two-forty."

"There are some things you need to learn first."

"Well, I'll open," said the lad. "I'm never backward at takin' new points. Dish it out. I'm boardin' here now, and will take down anything from hash to bread-pudding."

"The first is never to smoke in the presence of gentlemen."

"That pint's swallered," said the boy, flinging his cigar out of the window. "I've heered, though, that people ought to practice what they preach."

"What do you mean?" asked the merchant, taking another whiff at the cigar which he had himself been enjoying.

"I mean that you are smoking in the presence of a gentleman."

The boy sat erect in his chair, and looked into the merchant's face with the proud quality of an American citizen.

An odd smile came upon the merchant's face as he too flung away his cigar. The sharp retort of his visitor seemed to amuse him.

"So you consider yourself a gentleman?" he said.

"I don't lie and I don't steal. I don't swear, and I never begged. That's somethin' of a gentleman, anyhow. And I'm as polite as I've been brung up to be; which ain't much."

The merchant laid aside the papers which he had been examining. He pushed back his chair from the table and faced his visitor.

He was a hale, handsome man of some fifty years of age, somewhat imperious in manner, but with a strong sense of humor in his face. He seemed to think that he had met an original character.

"Who told you that those were marks of a gentleman?" he asked.

"I've seen folks a bit. Haven't traveled with my eyes shut. Can tell you too much; there's two hogs to every gentleman."

"More, I'm afraid. What is your name?"

"Will Somers."

"Where do you live?"

"In this here big town of Philadelphia, but in a little street that I s'pose you never heered the name of. I make myself at home anywhere, though."

"So it seems," said the merchant, glancing at the handsome appointments of his private office, and then at the ragged dress of the boy.

"It's only my coat and pants that's torn," said the latter, with an air of pride. "I'm all right inside. I bet there's not a coon in these diggin's can jump further, run faster, or lift more than me. And I never seen the day yet I was afraid of work. Now how about that job, mister?"

"Leonard," said the merchant.

"Mr. Leonard, I mean. I've been a-waiting to get hell of the north end of your name."

The merchant looked closely at his precocious visitor, who, to the age of a boy, added the self-assertion and experience of a grown man. The latter leaned back with easy assurance in his chair, and seemed indeed "at home."

"What have you been used to doing?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"What ain't I been used to would be a bit more like it," said Will, resting his two elbows on the table. "Blackin' boots, and sellin' papers, and holdin' hosses has been my big holts, but I've dipped into 'most everything else 'cept preaching."

"You have been a little vagabond, I suppose, all your life, and know as much of the world as men ought to at twenty-five."

"If there's a feller inside of ten miles of here that I've ever done anything mean, I can lick that feller; that's me!" cried Will, indignantly. "I'd

sooner open clams for a livin' than do what's not on the square."

"Do you know Philadelphia well?"

"Does a cat know milk? Bet I do. Could navigate it with my eyes shut, and know most everybody worth knowin'."

"Are your parents living?"

"Dunno 'bout my dad," said Will. "Spect I'm an orphan. Me and sis was drapped in this here town when we was like young kittens. A big white house, t'other side the Schuylkill, was our head-quarters. Dad sloped. Never heered of him since."

"The poor-house, eh?" said Mr. Leonard. "You have a sister?"

"Yes. She's slipped, too. Was took out when I was a baby. Never see'd her since. Hope the girl's sound. Know I've had mighty hard hoein'."

There was a touch of feeling in Will's voice which he sought to hide by greater recklessness of manner. Evidently he had a secret yearning for his lost sister.

Mr. Leonard was silent for several minutes before again speaking. He seemed to be debating something within himself.

"So you want to learn something of business?" he at length said.

"You've hit that nail square on the head," said Will, with energy. "I'm gettin' too big to shave the brush, or handle the extras. What's more, I'm not goin' to be a poor critter all my life. I want a bizz that's got money in it. I've set my eye on a brown-stone shanty up Broad street. If it's for sale ten years from now I'm in the market."

Mr. Leonard laughed slightly at the boy's tone of confidence.

"Fortunes ain't made as quickly as you fancy. my lad," he said.

"If I don't hang my hat up in that shanty, you can count me out," said Will.

"The saucy young rascal has the making of a business-man in him," said Mr. Leonard, to himself. "I would much rather have a boy that aimed high than one that aimed low. He is a handsome lad, too, and if better dressed would be quite presentable. I have half a notion to try him, with all his impudence. He is a perfect specimen of the street Arab, but he seems quick and intelligent."

"How about that job?" asked Will, impatiently. "I'm bound to strike one, somewhere, afore night. I've give you the refusal. If you don't go for it that's your loss. The man that gets me makes a ten-strike, and no braggin'."

"If I should give you employment could I depend on you to do what you were told?" asked the merchant.

"What I was told?" said Will, rising impulsively to his feet. "I wouldn't give a smashed cent for the feller who couldn't do more than he was told."

"That would never do," said Mr. Leonard, amused. "I want a boy to do just what he is told."

"And what chance is there for genius, then, if a feller can't spread a little?" asked Will, earnestly. "The boy that only does what he's told won't never get to Congress."

"And they who act beyond their instructions sometimes get to the State's prison, my boy. If I give you a position you must learn to never take a step without orders."

"I can try," said Will, with a comical leer, "but it'll go mighty ag'in the grain. Tain't the way I've been bringin' up."

Their conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of a person into the office.

He seemed to be one of Mr. Leonard's employes, and was a tall, well-built man, but dressed with a boorish vanity that at once attracted the boy's attention.

He looked with surprise at the merchant's strange visitor, a look of disdain coming upon his face, as he drew somewhat back, as if in fear of contamination. Will glared at him from head to foot, with a steady, impudent stare.

"The Everhart is in," he said. "The Danton shipment of silks on board. I have just received notice."

"That is good news, Wilson," replied Mr. Leonard. "The market is just ready for them. See to the custom-house charges at once. We must have them in store as soon as possible."

"I will attend to it," he said with a somewhat pompous air.

With another look of supercilious wonder at Will he left the room.

"Who's that cove?" asked the latter, an impudent smile upon his face.

"That is Mr. Augustus Wilson, my principal book-keeper."

"He is a hoss, he is," said Will, with a contemptuous puff. "A man of his size dressed like a peacock, and biting off his words like a school-girl. Why don't you call him Gus?"

"That would not be very respectful."

"He'd git as much as he goes for, I reckon," said Will, disdainfully. "I bet he's a dose."

"If I should give you employment, Will, you must learn to curb your tongue, and not be so insolent to the men in the store. They would not stand impudence from a boy."

"I'll get along with them. Don't you be afraid," said Will, with a look of confidence on his handsome face. "I've got along with folks all my life, and never been kicked yet. But I'm doubtful if I won't be callin' that cove Gus. He's a gay feller to Mister, he is."

"You will not stay here long, my lad, if you do. I warn you of that. He is my principal employe, and must be treated with respect. Understand me. Impudence will not serve."

"All right, Mr. Leonard. But I know I'll have a

fight every time I go to say Mister. Gus will be coming up. When am I to tackle?"

"What do you mean?"

"When will I dive in and take hold?" replied Will, with an earnest air. "This job I mean."

"Come round this hour to-morrow and I will let you know my decision," said Mr. Leonard, turning again to his papers.

"That won't gee," said Will, positively. "If you want me you'd best say so and be done with it. I'm bound to fetch work to-day."

"Very well," said the merchant, impatiently. "I will give you a trial. Now don't bother me any further."

"If you'd said that half an hour ago I wouldn't bothered you so long," said Will, saucily, as he strode out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

STORE LIFE.

MR. LEONARD was the proprietor of a large wholesale dry-goods house, on Market street. He dealt extensively in the richer qualities of goods, and cases of costly silks, rich shawls, a'd other expensive fabrics were constantly imported by him. He had a wide-spread and profitable trade, and was accounted a wealthy man.

There were a dozen or more salesmen, porters, etc., employed about the store, besides the numerous clerks in the counting-house, and in the business hours of the day the long, wide store bustled with activity till it seemed a very bee-hive of commerce.

Mr. Leonard really wanted a boy to perform various minor offices about the establishment, and in spite of Will's impudence the experienced eye of the merchant saw in him signs of energy and intelligence which seemed to promise well if properly trained.

His ragged clothes and soiled face were against him, but a little money would cure the one and a little water the other. The boy was handsome and strong-looking, and his insolence was not of the swaggering, incorrigible kind, but rather the native independence and sense of equality with all mankind of the street Arab. It was not in Will to show deference to a king on his throne.

A few days after his interview with Mr. Leonard found our young hero duly installed as office-boy and general utility in the store. His employer had found him a more creditable suit of clothes, and given him some useful instruction as to personal cleanliness, politeness, etc.

He had succeeded in greatly improving the outward appearance of the boy, but his mental crookedness was not to be so easily straightened. Will was essentially the same lad who had spent his life till now in stree. avocations, with intervals of fishing, lounging, swimming, fighting and saucing.

He was, as he had said, as active as a young leopard, could run, leap, wrestle and use his fists with any boy of his size in the city.

He took hold of business with a vim that promised well for his future usefulness, doing the work given him so rapidly and well as to greatly please his employer.

But there was no curbing his tongue, and more than one spat occurred between him and the salesmen, before he had been a day in the store. Before the end of the first week there was an outbreak which threatened to suddenly end his engagement.

"Here, boy, take this roll of cloth down to the store and give it to Mr. Johnson. Look alive, now, he is waiting for it."

This imperative address was made by a nervous, quick-spoken salesman, named Robert Brown.

Will was employed in opening a newly-arrived case of goods. He looked up with a glance of disdain.

"I've took in another job," he said. "Ain't doin' two things at once. You know the way down. Tot• it down yourself."

"What do you mean, you young rascal?" cried the man, in a passion. "If you stay in this place you will have to do what you're told or you'll be helped. Take this down at once. We will have no rebels here."

"What's goin' to happen if I don't?" said Will, dropping the tool he had been using.

"I'll send you spinning down-stairs and out of the store door in a hurry," said the man, still fuming.

"Look here, Mr. Brown, or Bob Brown, if you like it better, maybe you don't know that you're barking up the wrong tree," said Will, insolently.

"Ordering ain't in my line. Ask me like a gentleman and I'll stand on my head for you; but I'm not a feller that's used to bein' kicked by any man's toe or tongue, either."

"Then you won't take it down?"

"I'll see you so far t'other side of nowhere that a forty-horse team couldn't draw you back in a lifetime, afore I'll take it an inch."

Will returned to his former task of opening the case.

Mr. Brown's face was purple with rage, and the veins stood out on his forehead, as he listened to this unexampled rebellion.

"Why, you ragged, young reprobate, who was only brought here by charity!" he cried, hotly. "Hang me if I don't kick you down-stairs myself, and fling the goods after you!"

Suiting the action to the word he grasped Will with a nervous grip, and sought to hustle him to the head of the stairs.

But if ever man caught a Tartar, Mr. Brown had done so in this action.

Will lifted the iron tool in his hand with an impulse to strike his assailant. With another impulse he threw it from him, and used his sinewy limbs

with a vigor which Mr. Brown had not dreamed of his possessing.

In a moment he had torn loose from his grasp, and by an alert trip had stretched his toe on his back on the floor.

"That's the way I pile up my shingles!" cried Will, exultingly. "Come to time, old hoss, if you want to be curried. I've chawed up better men than you."

The language of the street, which he had partly laid aside, came back to Will in his excitement.

The furious salesmen sprung to his feet and rushed at the boy with clenched fists. Two other men, who had been engaged with them on the third floor of the building, hurried up.

"Hold there, Bob!" cried one of these. "Don't try that on a boy."

"Let him alone," said Will, as he deftly parried his blows. "He's my meat. I wasn't brung up on free fights to back down from a counter-hopper."

But the man who had spoken pushed between and separated them, just as Will planted his fist with a stinging blow on Brown's left cheek.

"Come, come, Bob!" said the peacemaker; "that's no way to settle disputes with a boy. If the fellow was been impudent report him to Mr. Leonard, but never try your fists on a boy."

"I wouldn't give three winks of a cat's tail for a room full of such men," said Will, as he turned coolly to his work. "I'm doin' Mr. Leonard's own job, and you can report till you're blind, and report till you can see again, and I can lick you after it's all over."

Mr. Brown did report, and Will was sent for to Mr. Leonard's office. Our hero proved a very poor hand at giving evidence in his own favor, but the men who had separated them described the whole occurrence.

"Don't let anything like this happen again," said Mr. Leonard, after lecturing Will severely. "Mr. Brown placed himself in the wrong or I would have to discharge you. Don't misuse the confidence I have placed in you."

"All right," said Will, independently. "But the man that tries to wipe his feet on me is goin' to touch ground with his nose, that's all."

This episode did not injure Will's standing in the store, for Mr. Brown was not a general favorite.

His good-humor and willingness to work soon gained him friends, and faults were excused in him that would have proved fatal otherwise to his position.

He had a fine voice, and sung ditties with wonderful vim. He could dance like a negro minstrel, could tumble like an acrobat, and had more tricks than a circus clown.

Nothing pleased him better than to get on one of the upper floors, out of sight of customers, and treat the admiring clerks to a taste of his quality.

His chief trouble, in such cases, sprung from the new clothes in which Mr. Leonard had dressed him.

"It's a gallus rig, I'll give in," he said, "but I ain't been used to fancy fixin's. There goes the coat, and here goes the vest, and up go the sleeves, and now I'm in trim for work. P'int out what you want done and I'm in."

"Nothing just now, Will. Let us have that ole Virginny break-down."

"Yes, I see myself waltzing round on my ear for you, and no planner music, and not even a jews-harp. Don't dance till I hear a tune. Whistle up, somebody, my boot-soles is itching."

One of the men whistled a quick tune, and Will's feet rattled over the floor in the most astonishing steps, relieving his feelings now and then by a summerset, or a dance on his hands.

"Hi, lads! let the music out," he cried. "That's your style! Heel and toe. Ain't I a screamer? Just observe me."

The next instant he was at the top of a high step-ladder, singing a negro medley for dear life, and keeping time with hands and feet on the boards.

"Ain't we guns?" he shouted, now worked up to full excitement. "Did you ever see me do the double-shuffle, up the middle, turn sixteen summersets over a blind elephant, and ride a circus mule? Oh, I tell you I'm a hoss. Spread the sawdust and I'll do you Jim Crow like a native."

"Hush! here comes Mr. Leonard," cried a scout. "He has heard all that rascally noise. Limber up and get to work quick."

The men hastened to various avocations, somewhat to Will's surprise. He was as honest as the sun, and would never have thought of such deceit. He had, all his life, fathered all his actions.

When Mr. Leonard appeared Will was seated in his shirt-sleeves on a dry-goods box, whistling in a low tone, and keeping time with his heels.

Mr. Leonard looked inquiringly around, a look of displeasure on his face.

"What has been going on here?" he asked, sharply. "I heard an uproar all the way down to my office. You are all suddenly at work. What have you been doing, boy?"

"Nothing. Only killing time," said Will, indifferently. "We kinder run out of work, and I wanted to learn these fellows a South street wharf break-down. Want to see me do it?"

Will jumped from his box and struck an attitude.

"No. And I want less noise and commotion. If you wish to stay in my employment you must learn to curl yourself a little. Let us have no more such performances."

"You suit me fast-rate so far. Got no notion of dischargin' you yet," said Will. "But what's to be done? I can't hold in. It's out of the question. There'd be something bu'st sure. There's no harm, when an engine's done workin', to let it blow off steam."

"I don't mind a little opening of the safety-valve."

said Mr. Leonard, smiling, "but I don't want a full head of steam poured out at once. I will have to bring you down-stairs, into the office, where I can have you under my own eye."

"Don't do it!" said Will, earnestly.

"Why not?"

"Cause I ain't to be trusted. I can't no more hold in, sometimes, than a runaway locomotive. I know I'd bu'st out singing, or stand on my head on top of an inkstand, or kick up a row with some of your pen-slingers. Don't do it."

"Well," said Mr. Leonard, turning on his heel to hide a broad smile, "I must give you some out-door work—send you on errands. Can I trust you to do them correctly?"

"I dunno. Won't make no promises. Tain't often I can trust myself. You can try me. That's the only way to find out. I know everything and everybody out of doors; that's something."

"Very well; I will try you."

Thenceforth Will varied his store duties with outdoor avocations, his quick and intelligent performance of which gave much satisfaction to his employer.

CHAPTER III.

MR. LEONARD'S VISITOR.

It was two or three days after the last narrated events that a slender, keen-eyed person stopped in front of Mr. Leonard's store. He was dressed in a suit of grayish clothes, and wore a wide-rimmed hat.

He glanced up at the lofty iron front, reaching five stories high, and then briskly entered the store, threading his way back between the open cases of goods which covered the long floor to the counting-house.

Sending in his card he was at once admitted to Mr. Leonard's private office.

"Take a seat, Mr. Fitler," said Mr. Leonard, pushing aside his papers.

Rising, he carefully closed the door and seated himself near the visitor.

"You received my message, then?"

"Yes, sir. You have need of my services?"

"I wish your advice at any rate. Let me tell you what has occurred. But first, does any of my men know you?"

"I think not. I know none of them."

"I have here an invoice of silks shipped me from Lyons, France, by Danton & Co. There were two cases of these goods, valued, as you see, at ten thousand dollars. They were very fine and costly goods."

"They must have been."

"The ship Everhart, which had them in freight, reached Philadelphia two weeks ago. Her cargo was duly discharged, and the goods deposited in the government warehouse."

"Why not brought at once to your store?" asked Mr. Fitler, drumming with his fingers on the table.

"Such was my intention, and I directed my confidential clerk, Mr. Wilson, to pay the duties, and see that they were brought here. He did the first, and obtained the government order for their delivery, which was locked up in my presence, in the fireproof there. He was hindered from doing the second by news of the death of a near relative in Harrisburg, whose funeral he was obliged to attend. I let the matter stand till his return, as I had no time to see to it myself."

"I perceive. What next?" said Mr. Fitler.

"A few words will conclude. On his return yesterday he went to the safe for the custom-house delivery-order. It was gone."

"Were you present?"

"Yes."

"Had you seen it in his absence?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Only for a full statement of facts."

"You will please understand that no possible suspicion attaches to Mr. Wilson, even if his absence did not preclude it. He has been in my service for ten years, and is incorruptible."

"Certainly," said Mr. Fitler, in an indifferent tone. "Somebody else has taken it. But that is not all?"

"No. I have just learned that the order was presented at the bonded warehouse last Tuesday by a gentlemanly-dressed person, accompanied by a drayman. The necessary entries were made, and the goods delivered."

"And where are they now?"

"That is what I want to find out."

"This is a bold robbery, Mr. Leonard," said the visitor, with energy. "It looks very much as if the black sheep was in your own store. Is there any one whom you suspect?"

"There is none."

"Who has access to your safe?"

"None of my salesmen have business in here. Any of my book-keepers might have. Three or four of them are obliged to enter my office, in my absence, in the regular discharge of their duties."

"What is the record of these three or four men?"

"The best. They are all steady, quiet business men, married and living moderately. I know them all well."

"These smooth-watered wells are sometimes very deep," said Mr. Fitler. "Have you any new hands?"

"Yes. One, whom I took on two weeks ago."

"Ha!" said the visitor, interested. "Could he enter your office without suspicion?"

"He could. I have employed him as a messenger."

"Every confidence in him, too?"

"I think him thoroughly honest."

"You have too much trust in human nature, Mr. Leonard," said his visitor, with a shrug. "If you were in my profession you would have very little."

I would like to see this new hand. Can you call him in on some pretense?"

"You have seen him. He is the messenger I sent for you."

"What? That boy? He is in your employment? Well, that beats!" Mr. Fitler leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily but silently.

"Do you know him?" asked Mr. Leonard, with some displeasure.

"Know him? I should think so. Who don't know Willful Will? That is his street name. Why, I thought you had picked him up at your door and sent him after me. He did look strange to me. I never saw him in a whole suit of clothes before. The idea of his settling down to steady business! How do you get along with him?"

"He is impudent and independent, and rather quarrelsome. But he is quick and bright as a bee, and has a man's strength."

"Quick and bright. I bet he is."

"You know him so well; do you think I did wrong to trust him?"

"No, no; you have no more sterling honesty in your establishment. Will has led a rough life, and will give you some queer touches of his quality before he has been here a month. But the boy will not lie or steal. I know him well."

"He is a handsome lad, and I think has the making of a business man."

"Very likely, if he can be tamed. Just call him in; I would like to talk with him."

"He is not in at present. I sent him, this morning, out to my residence, near Germantown."

"Is Mr. Wilson at hand?"

"Yes. I will call him."

Mr. Leonard went to the door of the office and asked for Mr. Wilson. The latter was in the counting-room, and immediately entered.

The keen eyes of the visitor were fixed on him as he came in, taking in at a glance, as it seemed, every detail of his face, form and dress.

"Mr. Wilson, this is Mr. Fitler, a detective officer from the central station," said the merchant. "He has sent for him to investigate that affair of the robbery."

"I hope he can help us in it," said Mr. Wilson, as he quietly seated himself.

"The rascals were wide-awake, Mr. Wilson," said the detective, "in taking advantage of your trip to Harrisburg. Was the fact that you had paid ti duties and could not attend to taking the goods on of bond talked about in the store?"

"It was no secret in the counting room," said Mr. Wilson.

"What is your opinion of the bookkeepers, sir?"

"I have full confidence in them. They are only men, to be sure, and may have talked outside. Secrets will leak out, you know."

"Could the store have been entered at night?"

"No, no," said Mr. Leonard. "Nothing has been tampered with. The order was stolen in the daytime, while the safe was open."

"How does the store-keeper at the bonded warehouse describe the parties who took away the goods?"

"In a very vague fashion," replied Mr. Wilson. "He could not have noticed them closely. His description did not remind me of anybody I knew."

Mr. Fitler watched him as he spoke, seeming attracted by his popish dress and stilted manner of speaking.

"I will see the store-keeper myself," he answered. "It is unlucky that you were called away at such a time, Mr. Wilson. Was it a near relative?"

"Ah! I am somewhat acquainted in Harrisburg. What name, pray?"

"Miles Sartain," answered Mr. Wilson, with composure.

"The name is not familiar. I thought I might have known him," said the officer, carelessly. "Pity he hadn't lived a few days longer. Suppose now we go more into details in this matter."

A long conference ensued, in which the detective closely questioned them in reference to their usual mode of conducting business, the names, habits and personal characters of all the employees, and also of the persons who had called on Mr. Leonard during the suspicious period. He left, at length, after cautioning them to continued secrecy, and advising a close observance of all the men in the place, to see if there was any nervousness or change of habits.

"I will drop in myself to-morrow, and look round," he said. "You may not know me, but don't be surprised if a stranger makes himself at home. I will see the store-keeper this afternoon, and will set the police authorities at work to try and trace these missing goods. I may get a more precise description from him, and be able to follow the dray on which they were taken off."

He bowed himself out of the office, leaving Mr. Wilson and his employer in busy conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

WILL MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

MEANWHILE Willful Will, as the officer had called him, was on his way to Mr. Leonard's country-seat. He bore a note addressed to a Miss Jennie Arlington, a resident of the merchant's house, which he was directed to deliver into her own hands without delay, and wait for any return message.

The car on the street railway took him within half a mile of the place, and his nimble feet soon accomplished the rest of the distance.

The mansion was a broad-fronted, brown-stone edifice, richly ornamented, and surrounded with beautifully-kept grounds, in which now a host of flowers were in bloom.

Seen from the front, through its vailing screen of

Will Somers.

leaves and blossoms, it seemed an abode of wealth and taste very attractive to any artistic eye. Even Will paused for five minutes, in a day-dream, gazing in. The boy was not without the poetic instinct.

He was stirred from his reverie by the approach of a servant-woman to the gate.

"Say, you there," cried Will, as she turned back.

"This Mr. Leonard's?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"All square then. I want to see Jennie."

"See who?" asked the woman, in surprise.

"Jennie. You know. Can't go her last name. Slipped clean out of my head."

"If it has, it wouldn't hurt you to say Miss Jennie."

"I can't see that it would do me any good," said Will, leaning indolently on the gate.

"Miss Arlington is not in. You can't see her," said the woman.

"Bet a hoss that I will," he replied, positively.

"Mr. Leonard didn't send me here on a fool's errand. Where is she?"

"What do you want? I will give her your errand when she comes in."

"Maybe so, when you get it," said Will, mysteriously. "Hope you don't kalkerlate to pick up secrets that easy. There's things it don't do for everybody to know. Jennie and me's posted. We're not sellin' out as cheap as that. Where is the gal?"

"Find out, you impudent fellow," said the woman, angrily. "I don't believe Mr. Leonard would send such a boy as you."

"He did anyhow, and if I can't see the gal there'll be somethin' bu'st. Want me to go back and report?"

Will had quite forgotten the charge of polite behavior which Mr. Leonard had given him.

"She is down there in the wood," said the woman, thinking he might be telling the truth. "I hope you may find her, and that she will give you some lessons in good manners."

"Good-by, my daisy. Farewell, my morning primrose," said Will, with a wave of his hand. "I won't forget you. Look for a love-letter to-morrow morning sharp."

Breaking into a gay ditty, Will hastened off toward the piece of woodland indicated by the woman, leaving the latter hardly knowing whether to be angry or amused.

"I wonder where Mr. Leonard picked up such a scapegrace as that," she said, as she turned back.

The ground sloped downward from the back of the house into a wide depression that led off toward the Schuylkill. This was occupied by a piece of fine woodland, the trees growing straight and tall, while the undergrowth had been mostly removed, leaving long, green vistas.

The country was now arrayed in all its June-tide beauty, while flowers lent a rich charm to the fields, and the fresh green of spring arrayed every tree. Birds flitted through the warm air, rich-hued butterflies floated silently by, and a swarm of insects sprung up before his feet as he strode briskly through the long green grasses.

Nature had an ardent hold on Will's imagination which he had had little chance of gratifying, and he enjoyed this walk as hungry men enjoy a rare luxury.

The old vagabond instinct rose in him as he sauntered on, now chasing a gorgeous butterfly, now following the flight of some swift bird, now stopping to listen to a trill of woodland music, now taking a wild roll in the grass.

His cap was soon adorned with daisies and buttercups; violets peeped from his button-holes, and he gathered a bouquet of yellow dandelions as if he thought them choice flowers.

"If this ain't gay I don't know beans!" he cried, exultingly. "Wouldn't I like to live out here! Bet I'd go a-fishin' every day, and a-swimmin' every other. I'll go a hoss there ain't a tree in that woods I can't climb. Got a notion to shin up some of them just for fun."

But a frisking ground-squirrel took his attention, and drove out of his head the project of tree-climbing.

This fellow chased to his hole, other objects attracted Will's delighted eyes, and led him step by step into the woods. The boy was a true son of Nature, and all thought of his special errand had quite escaped him.

Finally, some sounds behind a thin screen of bushes attracted his notice. He drew carefully up and looked through. There on a flat stone, beside a flowing brook, sat a young lady, her lap full of wild flowers, which she was deftly forming into a bouquet.

She seemed quite young, at furthest not more than eighteen, and was very beautiful as she sat there all unconscious of stranger's eyes. She was tall and well-formed, with a face of most classic outline—the general contour of the features not unlike Will's own. But the cheek had a peachy bloom which his had long lost, and a gentle, womanly expression replaced his saucy independence.

"Sell me out if she ain't a beauty!" said Will enthusiastically. "Them long curls is scrumptious. Wonder if she's my game? I'll give her a start, just for fun."

Placing his two hands to his mouth the woods rung with a long, clear call of "Jennie!"

The girl sprang up, dropping most of her flowers, and looked round in alarm.

"Jennie!" again rung out in Will's deep, musical tones.

"Who calls?" she said, with parted lips, standing like a statue of flight.

Her question was answered by a crash in the bushes, and the appearance of a figure coming with a double summerset into her presence.

"You Jennie?" asked Will, standing suddenly on his feet before her.

She looked at the sturdy, handsome lad with a look in which trepidation was mingled with amusement.

"I am Miss Arlington," she replied, with dignity.

"That's too much of a mouthful," said Will, on whom dignity was quite thrown away. "Jennie's a shorter handle. You can call me Will and that will square it."

"What do you mean by calling me in that manner, and coming into a lady's presence like a mountebank?"

"That's the way I always come in," said Will, impressively. "And you looked so pretty setting there I wanted to give you a start."

"Don't do it again. It is not manly behavior," she replied. "What do you want with me?"

"I've got a 'pistole,'" said Will, fumbling in his pockets.

"A pistol!" she exclaimed, drawing hastily back.

"Reckon so. But it's not a shootin'-iron, so don't be skeered. There's the dockymen, now, that Mr. Leonard guv me for you."

"Mr. Leonard? Are you the new store boy that he has told me of?" she asked, as she opened the letter.

"Been a talkin' about me, has he?" asked Will. "Hope he ain't gone back on me. Bet he can't find jist sich another in these diggin's."

"He said that you were a good-intentioned boy, and that he might make something of you if he could only cure you of your impudence."

"Well, that's clever in him. Mebbe he don't know the job he's takin' in. Mought just as well try to cure a grapevine from twisting."

"Come with me to the house," said Miss Arlington, on reading the letter. "I am to send a package back by you."

"Lucky it ain't a cook-stove, or something else nice and handy to carry," said Will, as he walked on beside his new acquaintance. "Live with Mr. Leonard?"

"I do."

"How old mought you be?" asked Will, earnestly. "That is no question to ask a lady," she replied, with a smile.

"Oh, we're not playin' gentleman and lady; we're playin' boy and gal. You're not come out yet, or not engaged, or nothin' of that nonsense, are you?"

"That is another question that you have no business to ask."

"I'd like to know how I'd ever learn anything if I didn't ask questions? That's the way I come to be so wide awake."

"Just suppose, then, that you go to sleep again. I imagine you must learn something from everybody you meet!"

"I generally pick up a point or two."

"There is one point, or rule of action, I would like to give you."

"Let's have it, then."

"It is this. Always mind your own business. I think you will find that a good rule to go by, both in and out of the store."

"Why, bless you, gal," said Will, with a merry laugh. "I've been told that twice as often as I've got fingers and toes, and I don't think it's done a unit of good. I can't no more stop takin' care of other people's bizness than I can stop eatin'. I dunno how I'd get along, or other people either, if it wasn't for my curiosity. It ain't impudence; it's only my nat'r disposition."

The young lady, who had been a little angry at his questions, could not help laughing.

"You are an odd boy," she said. "If I was in want of a confidant I might accept you. I will tell you this much: I am engaged."

"Well, now, that's bad," said Will. "Can't you break with the feller? Give him the sack. Tell him you've a notion to go to California, and don't want no company. Sling him somehow."

"Why should I?" she asked, turning her brilliant brown eyes on Will.

"Now don't look at me that way or I can't tell you," he said, with affected bashfulness. "Jist turn your eyes away for a minute."

"Well, go on," she replied, turning away.

"I like you, gal, and there's no joke in that. Can't you just sling the other feller, and wait for me? I'm goin' to be a rich man, you can bet on that."

"Do you want an answer now?" she asked, in a constrained tone.

"If it comes handy to you I'd just as lieve."

"Here it is, then," she replied, giving him a ringing box on the ear.

With a laugh she sprung through the gate, which they had just reached, and hurried into the house, leaving Will completely crestfallen.

She did not reappear, but sent a servant with the package which Will was to take back. He trudged off reflectively toward the cars.

"Got served right, I s'pose," he said, "for I was impudent. But I ain't done with the gal yet. Bet I give her as good as she sent. I don't let myself be sold cheap."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

"I do not know what to make of this," said Mr. Leonard, as he sat with a bank-book and a package of canceled checks in his hand. "I am very positive that my account is not overdrawn. This settlement makes me five hundred dollars short, where I should have, at least, one thousand dollars to my credit."

"It is very strange," said Mr. Wilson. "We have never found an error in our account with the Mechanic's Bank before."

"They paid my check without hesitation!"

"Certainly. They would have paid it if it had been ten thousand. Your credit is unsullied."

"I don't understand this, and don't like it," said Mr. Leonard, gravely. "Let us go over these checks and deposits. The bank may be in error. I have here my private check-book, which Will has just brought from my house; I think it likely some personal check of mine may have gone to the wrong bank."

"That may be it," said Mr. Wilson, with a gesture of relief, as if he had been much troubled by the mystery.

"But there is no use forming theories. We have here the solution of the difficulty. Call off the checks, and I will compare them with the check-book entries."

They proceeded to do so, Mr. Leonard taking the memoranda and his bookkeeper called out the amounts and dates of the checks.

"Fifteen hundred and seventy-three," he repeated.

"May 23d."

"Are you sure? There is no such check of that date in either book. To whose order is it drawn?"

"To Gilbert, Cook & Co., or bearer," said Mr. Wilson, looking up with a glance in which a doubt was struggling.

"But we owed them no such amount. They were paid in full on the 15th," said Mr. Leonard, in excitement. "And they never would have asked for a check to be drawn to *bearer*. Let me see that."

Be snatched it out of Mr. Wilson's hand, in his excitement.

The latter sat with a pallid and serious face, looking at his employer.

"By Heaven!" cried the merchant, rising hastily to his feet. "I never wrote that signature; that check was never drawn in this office. It is a forgery!"

The two men looked at each other with half affrighted glances.

"Can it be possible?" cried Mr. Wilson.

"Possible? It is a fact!" was the vehement answer. "The signature is good. I might be deceived by it myself, only that I know I did not write it. This is a bad business, Wilson."

"A terribly bad business," was the reply. "Who could have done it? There is a black sheep in our mid."

"Can there be?" said the merchant, turning pale as he thought of the late robbery from his safe.

"Do you suspect any one?"

"No one but yourself, sir," said Wilson, in his slow, stilted manner. "I suspect you of undue faith in human nature. If you choose to take into your store a street boy of notorious character, what can you expect?"

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Leonard, in arms for his protege.

"I mean that that boy's coming here was not without an object. I suspected from the first that he might have been sent here as the tool of some designing knaves, who knew your easy disposition."

"You have no right to talk this way Wilson."

"Indeed I have," said the clerk, with energy. "There is plainly a thief in your store. Yet the character of everybody here has been proved by years of trust. Two weeks ago you introduced here a boy of very doubtful antecedents, and in that two weeks two serious robberies have been consummated. What is the natural conclusion?"

"Where is the boy? Let us have him in here," said Mr. Leonard, moving angrily to the door.

"No, no! that is no way to act," cried Wilson. "He is a keen knave; you will put him on his guard."

"Where is the boy, Will Somers?" asked Mr. Leonard of the person who responded to his call.

"In the store, sir. You told him to count that voice of Milton cloths, but they have already been examined and found correct."

"Yes. I remember. I gave him that task on account of his delay this afternoon in his errand to my house. Tell him that he need not mind it."

"Do you wish him here, sir?"

"No, no. That will do, Mr. Johnson."

"You are right," he continued, after this person had retired. "I was going to act hastily. It does look suspicious for the boy. But I cannot believe him guilty without positive evidence."

"You must go a different way to get it. Give this matter to the detective, along with the other. I warrant he will make something of it."

"I will do so," said Mr. Leonard. "This troubles me sadly, Wilson. After fifteen years of business to find myself suddenly the sport of a daring thief and forger. I who have trusted people with full faith in human nature. Nor can we tell where the bolt may fall next. Some crushing robbery may ensue. What can be done?"

"Nothing, but to watch and wait," said Wilson, calmly. "I do suspect that boy. I firmly believe that he is the stool-pigeon of some bold and expert villains. I see nothing we can do now but to have him closely watched, and learn all his associations. That the detective can do far better than we."

"We will leave it in his hands, then," said Mr. Leonard, closing his check-book with a determined snap.

Meanwhile the subject of this conversation was giving a touch of his quality to the salesmen.

"Say what you please," he remarked, "but Mr. Leonard does live gay. Never seen a finer shanty; and there's no end to the roses and posies around it. Had high old run through the woods, and come across a highfalutin' gal, you bet."

"Did you fall in love with her?"

"Maybe so; though I can't see it's any of your biz. She was scrumptious, I tell you. She lives with

Mr. Leonard. The old man had his back up when I come back, 'cause I staid so long."

"He laid you out then?"

"He told me I had to finish counting them Milton cloths. I told him the store would be shut up afore I got half through. He said he couldn't help that, it was my fault for staying so long."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'm goin' to count them, if it takes me all night."

"You needn't mind them. They have already been counted," said Mr. Johnson, who had approached during this talk. "Mr. Leonard will let you free from the task."

"Mebbe he'd best wait till he's asked!" said Will, resolutely. "I don't blow hot and cold with no man, and I don't let no man blow hot and cold with me. He laid it onto me heavier than suits me, and now I'm going to let him see that I can do as I'm told. I don't keer if everybody in the store has counted them cloths. That's my job and I'm bound to put her through."

"But, Will, Mr. Leonard excuses you."

"I don't excuse him, then. I boss my own jobs. I told him I wouldn't give a brass flip for the boy who couldn't do more than he was told. I'll let him see that I doin' as much as I'm told."

Heedless of their efforts to convince him of the folly of this resolution, Will hastened to the cellar stairs, and down into the basement, where the cases of cloth in question stood, freshly opened.

"He's an odd duck, but he will soon get a dose of that," said one of the men.

"Yes, a half-hour's work will satisfy him," said Mr. Johnson.

They did not know Will's vim. He labored on an hour, for two hours, in lifting the heavy rolls of cloth from the cases, counting, and replacing them. It was quite dark here, and he had lit the gas at the start. He did not, in fact, know how long he had been engaged, when the light suddenly dimmed and went out.

Will stood in almost utter darkness, only a faint light entering at the narrow window. He ran to turn off the gas, not understanding what put it out. As he did so he heard the clang of a door overhead.

The truth rushed to his mind. The store had been shut and fastened, the gas turned off as usual at night, and everybody had gone home, quite forgetting that he was still in the cellar.

Will was inclined to be superstitious, and a sense of fright came upon him as he found himself alone in this lonely, dark room. He groped his way to the stairs and tried the door. It was firmly bolted. All his efforts could not move it. He called out at the top of his voice, but no answer came back.

"I'm a reg'lar rat in a cage," he muttered, as he made his way to the windows, thinking to break a pane and call for help. But they faced on a deserted alley, and he feared if even he should bring aid, it would only be to be arrested as a thief.

"I wonder if there is any ghosts in these diggin's, as some of the men say?" he muttered, looking fearfully around. "I don't like it a bit. I've never been in such a 'tarnal scrape in my life. Blame their eyes, they know'd I was down here, why didn't they call me up? I believe it was done a-purpose. If I don't be even with some of them yet, you can sell me."

He groped his way about the dark room like an unquiet spirit, stumbling over boxes and bales of rich and costly goods, peering fearfully into gloomy corners, trying in vain every possible avenue of escape.

But even a cornered coward grows brave, and Will was no coward. The superstitious dread could not long hold the mastery over his bold spirit. It was not long before he threw off the fears which had troubled him.

"I ain't no baby, to be skeered by a shadder," he said. "Let what will come I'm goin' to have a snooze anyhow. I dunno what's the reason a feller couldn't sleep as sound here as in my little eight-by-ten hole at home? Bet I make a soft bed, and that there ain't no ghost or sich bothers itself to waken me up."

The bed did not lack softness, after he had opened and spread out yard after yard of rich, soft goods on the floor, using some of the heavy cloths he had been counting as a substratum.

"They hadn't no biz to lock me up here if they didn't want their stuff tumbled," he said. "I don't keer a chip whether they like it or no, I'm not goin' to be cheated out of a bed and out of a sound sleep that way."

But his slumbers were not sound, for reasons which we have not space to give here. What Will saw, and what happened to him that night in the gloomy cellar, must be left for future chapters to declare.

CHAPTER VI.

WILL'S FIRST SALE.

No one in Mr. Leonard's establishment was aware of the fact that a rat of a new species had made free that night with the contents of the cellar. Will, for reasons of his own, kept his adventure secret, appearing in the store the next morning as if he had just walked in from the street.

It had not been so easy to remove the traces of his rough usage of the goods, and he had spent considerable time in smoothing and folding the cloths, the richer and more fragile materials which had served him for a bed.

Whatever his reasons he managed to quite conceal the fact that he had not slept that night in his usual place of repose, nor was there anything in the appearance of the cellar to create suspicion that it had contained a lodger during the still hours of the night.

Something had happened which he considered it

important to keep secret, and he went about his duties with a vim intended to prove that there was no weight on his mind, but that he was as fresh and free from care as a daisy.

Not that any one was likely to suspect him of harboring a mystery. He seemed much too frank for that. But then he did not know himself in that particular. Nor, for that matter, did they know him.

"Hope the old man won't be for sendin' me all over creation to-day," he said to one of his cronies in the store. "Was up late last night, and am sorter used up this mornin'."

"What kept you up?"

"Oh! 'skeeters. First crop of the season. Couldn't snooze a wink. They go for me barefooted, the pesky little rascals."

"I didn't know they were about yet."

"There's more things than that you don't know. I can tell a 'skeeter's song across a meetin'-house, and they can pick me out of a barn full of folks. If I hate anything wuss than rattlesnakes, it's 'skeeters."

"I suppose you must have had bad dreams, if you were troubled that way."

"Not much to speak of. When I set myself out to sleep there ain't no joke about it. Got no time to waste in dreamin' or any sich nonsense. Did you ever try to wake up an oak log?"

"Shouldn't think it would be easy."

"Well, that's me asleep. You might get up a patent earthquake under me, and I'd just roll over and go at it ag'in."

"And yet a musketeer troubled you?"

"The rascal wouldn't let me get to sleep, that was the row. If I'd got into a snooze once a regiment of 'em might have charged bayonets on me, and couldn't make me as much as wink."

"Here, Will," called Mr. Johnson. "You are wanted front."

"All right," returned Will, cheerfully. "I'm the lad for your money if it's anything under a ton weight to carry."

It was out of the question, however, for him to proceed soberly through the store. He went at something like a bat's flight, taking a case of goods in his way at a leap.

There were several dray-loads of goods unloading, and he was busily occupied for an hour. He was just at leisure again when he observed a person who had at that moment entered the store, and seemed to be looking around for a salesman.

He was a middle-aged person, who seemed from his dress and general appearance to be from the country, and not much used to city ways.

Above his flaming red necktie was a face of mingled simplicity and shrewdness, a beard of a week's growth, covering the lower portion of his visage, while flax-like hair escaped from under his wide-brimmed felt hat and straggled over his forehead.

Will looked around for a salesman. There was no one near. This was a difficulty he was not long in overcoming. He was intending to learn the whole business. Why not begin now?

"Calculatin' to invest in dry-goods?" he said, addressing the stranger.

"Why, I'd like to buy a small bill of goods," said the man, with a slow, hesitating accent.

"Hitch hosses then, and come along here. I'm the man you want. What'll you have to-day? Silks, shawls, dress goods? Got some fine new styles aboard. See here, this is jist the article you want, to a thread."

In a trice Will had partly unrolled a rich fabric of the most delicate shades of color.

"Shall I lay you out a piece of this? It's dog cheap. Just look at that stuff! Did you ever see anything as handsome? You can feel it, too, if your fingers are clean. Every spot on that would be a dollar out of pocket. How many pieces did you say? That's jist the goods to slide off like butter off of hot cakes, in your diggin's."

"No, no," said the customer, with difficulty restraining Will's flow of words. "Silks don't sell down our way. We're simple folks and don't do any grand dressing. I'd like to look at the calicoes."

"The what?" said Will, starting back in open-mouthed surprise.

"The calicoes," said the man, hesitating, as if he feared he had made a serious blunder.

"Look ye here," said Will, touching his arm in a patronizing manner. "What part of Uncle Sam's farm might you be from?"

"I'm from Woodenville, down in Bucks county," said the customer, drawing back in a timid manner.

"Kalkered so," replied Will. "Vote for General Jackson last 'lection'?"

"See here, boy," said the man, a little angrily, "we don't allow no one to poke fun at us down our way."

"All right, boss; don't get your back up. I'd a notion they always run the old General down that way. But, ain't you got into the wrong corn-field? Does this shanty look like a calico shop?"

"Not much," said the man, looking round. "You may have some goods though to suit me. We keep a few choice dress goods."

"Known you did," said Will, confidently. "See'd it in your eye at first sight. Known you wasn't no ten-cent calicoer. Can show you goods from fifty cents a yard to fifty dollars. Trot down this way. I'll make your eyes water."

One of the regular salesmen now approached, not much to Will's liking, to take charge of this customer.

But the latter seemed very well satisfied with his young attendant, saying:

"I am obliged to you, but this young man can show me all I want to see. I am only buying a small bill."

Will, proud of his new position, worked his man diligently around the store, showing him a variety of goods, and asking him a greater variety of questions, about the state of the crops, what kind of poultry he preferred, banty or game, how much corn it took to fatten pigs, what was his favorite breed of potatoes, etc.

He seemed to have suddenly developed a powerful desire for agricultural news, and his customer answered him as if pleased with his interest.

"I'll have my bill now, please," said the man, after selecting several pieces of dress goods.

"That's an inch or two out of my line," answered Will. "The fellers in the office will put that through. This way. Got to report at the captain's office."

The clerks looked rather wonderingly at Will's ushering a customer into the office, and proceeding with much dignity to introduce him, and report the items of his purchase to the entry-clerk.

Meanwhile the country customer walked lazily about the office, asking simple questions of this on and that, and waiting for their replies, with eye fixed on their faces as intently as if much hung on the response.

Some few were inclined to cut sly jokes at his expense, but the majority kept soberly to their words, briefly answering his questions.

There seemed to be considerable of the Yankee in him, judging from the inquisitive character of his remarks, and he continued to lounge about the counting-room, and address the clerks, for some time after his bill was ready.

"Who did you say kept this store?" he asked of a young man who was intently engaged on a huge ledger.

"Mr. Leonard," was the short answer.

"Leonard, hey? I used to know Leonards. Anything to the Bucks county Leonards?"

"I don't know," snapped the clerk.

"What might his first name be?"

"It might be John, or Tom, or a dozen other names."

"You're a little smart, young man," said the customer, unabashed. "What is his name, if that suits you better?"

"Henry," said the clerk, plunging again into his figures.

"Henry. Reckon I know him, then. Is he in?"

"Your bill is ready, sir," said another clerk, addressing him.

"Very well. Hold on to it a minute. I want to see Mr. Leonard."

"He is in his private office, and closely engaged. I do not think he would like to be disturbed."

"Oh, he won't mind me," said the countryman, confidently. "I know he will be glad to hear from his uncle Tim, and Jake Leonard, his first-cousin. You see, I know the family."

"I am afraid he is too busy just now. I will ask him if he has time to see you."

"Now there ain't no use for that in the world. I won't trouble him a bit. Wouldn't like to get back to Bucks county without I could tell Jake that I'd had a talk with his relation. Ain't this the office?"

"Yes," said the clerk, doubtfully.

"I'll drop in then. There ain't no use in standing on such ceremony."

"A repressed laugh ran through the office as the simple-minded but persistent customer opened the door and ushered himself into Mr. Leonard's room.

"He's green as a cucumber," said the entry-clerk, as he returned to his desk.

"I'd like to be inside. There will be fun there," said another.

"The chap isn't as big a fool as he's lettin' on," said Will to himself, as he retired from the office. "There's a sharpness about his eyes that puts me in mind of something I've seen before."

Mr. Leonard looked up in surprise as his visitor entered his office, and stood looking curiously around.

"Well, sir," said the merchant, "can I do anything for you?"

"I reckon not," said the man, quietly. "Just been buying some goods out in the store."

"Ah! Well, I hope you were suited."

"Yes, pretty well."

"I am glad to hear that. I hope you will excuse me now. I am very busily engaged. Will be happy to do anything for you though if I can."

"Are you anything to the Bucks county Leonards?" said the customer, taking a seat instead of knocking the merchant's hint.

"No. I am not from that part of the country," said Mr. Leonard, impatiently.

"Not, hey? Thought you might be. There's a Jake Leonard down there, a real clever fellow. Do you know him? Maybe he is something to you."

"I don't know him."

"Well, well, it was just a notion of mine. Go on with your writing. Don't let me disturb you."

Mr. Leonard resumed his pen, taking his free-and-easy visitor at his word. The latter stretched his self out indolently, seeming to wonder at the rapid motion of his host's pen.

"You've got the regular Leonard nose," he length said. "Look enough like Jake to be his cousin."

The merchant pushed back his chair in great annoyance.

"You will excuse me, sir," he said, "but I am engaged on important business. My clerks can attend to you."

"I think not," said the visitor.

"Why not?"

"Because I wouldn't like to post them in my business. You wouldn't like me to ask them if there's anything new in the custom-house robbery."

Mr. Leonard rose hastily to his feet, and stood looking with alarmed visage at the speaker.

"Who are you?" he asked, in anxious tones.

Will Somers.

"Not the bird whose feathers I wear, you can be sure of that," said the man, laughing. "I called on you yesterday, and told you then that I would be here this morning, but that you would not know me."

"Not Mr. Fitler! That is not possible!"

"That is my name," said the visitor, whose face had quite lost its expression of simplicity.

He lifted the wide-brimmed hat from his head, and with it came the straggling yellow locks which had helped to disguise him. Mr. Leonard knew the face now, though he was still half-masked by his stubby beard.

"I've been having a look at your office hands, and asked them a few questions," he said.

"With what result?"

"None. Appearances are all correct. If there are any rascals among them they have the wit to keep it out of their looks and voices."

"Have you gained any clew to the custom-house fraud?"

"Not as yet. I have put all the sharp eyes I could on the track. It is a new style of work and I don't know just where to place it among the professionals."

"It is no professional," said Mr. Leonard.

"You think so?" remarked Mr. Fitler, looking up.

"I am sure. Please examine that check. It is my printed form, you see, and my correct signature."

"Well?"

"It is a forgery."

"The deuce! And when did this come in on you?"

"I discovered it yesterday; after your visit."

"The plot is thickening, and is getting narrowed down," said Mr. Fitler, curiously. "Do you recognize the writing in the body of the check?"

"No. The hand is plainly a disguised one."

"Perhaps so. I am not sure. I would like to compare it with the handwriting in the custom-house entry. Can I have the check for a day or two?"

"Certainly."

"Tell me all the particulars of the forgery."

Mr. Leonard proceeded to give him the information with which the reader is already acquainted, to which his visitor listened with intent interest, asking many shrewd questions.

"There's a deep one at work here, but I bet he'll have a shallow spot," said the detective. "There's a traitor in your own store. I had best pay for my goods and take them away. If I act the country customer I will have an excuse for often dropping in. Good-day. I have been long enough here."

Resuming his hat Mr. Fitler left the office.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE IN THE BASEMENT.

MR. ABRAHAM SMITH, as the country customer called himself, paid for the small bill of goods which he had purchased.

"How shall we ship them?" asked the clerk.

"You needn't mind. I will be in town for a week or two. Am on a visit, you see. Just lay them by. Might have to buy something else before I go back and can have all sent together."

"Very well," said the clerk. "That will be all right."

"I've got a deal to tend to, you see," said Mr. Smith, confidentially. "Ain't seen my city relatives for two years, and they're a bit riled about it. I had a chat with Mr. Leonard in there. He's a nice man."

"You found him so?" asked the clerk, suppressing a smile.

"Yes. I'm sure he's of the Bucks county stock, though he won't say so. I'd know the Leonard nose anywhere. Good-day, Mr.—What did you say your name was?"

"Harvy."

"Good-day, Mr. Harvy. I'll call ag'in. I want to have another chat with Mr. Leonard about family matters. There's no use for him to deny it when it's in his eyes and in his very whiskers."

Mr. Smith left the office, quite innocent of the fact that he left a breeze of amusement behind him.

Will met him on his way out.

"Want them things shipped?" he asked.

"Well, not just now," said Mr. Smith, slowly. "Lay them away till I call around ag'in."

"Yur order's in the office, I s'pose?"

"Yes," said the customer, edging toward the door. "What did you say was the best growin' potater?" asked Will, posting himself in the doorway.

"The Peachblows, down our way."

"Ain't Murphies good?"

"We don't raise them," said Mr. Smith, with a motion as if he would like to get past him.

"How high do the bushes grow? About three feet, don't they?"

"About that high."

"With long, narrow roots?"

"Yes. I see you know something about potatoes. Excuse me, I'm in a hurry."

Mr. Smith brushed past him as if he was tired of being catechized.

"I know a darn sight more about 'taters than you do, that's certain," said Will, to himself. "If I'd kept on he'd told me they grew on apple trees. I ain't blind, Smithy. There's somethin' underhand at work here. If I don't twig what it is afore long, my name ain't Willful Will."

"What are you doing here?" said Mr. Wilson, just then entering. "Can you find no work, that you must be lounging round the front door? Come in. I will find something for you to do."

He spoke sharply, as if much displeased at Will's impudence.

"Duno that I'm much afraid of work," said the latter. "Nobody round here says that. No use

throwin' hints as if I wasn't ready to do what I take hold of."

"I wish no impudence," said Mr. Wilson, angrily. "People here are expected to attend to their duties, without answering back everything that is said to them."

"The folks that brung me up," retorted Will, "learnt me that what's sass for the goose is sass for the gander. Don't throw stones at a feller if you don't want them thrown back at you. What do you want me to do?"

"To save your impertinence for the street vagabonds who were your old companions," said Mr. Wilson, hotly. "Don't try it on, here. I don't want to point out your work. You can find it for yourself, or get out of this establishment, whichever you prefer."

"When I get orders from head-quarters I'll slide," called Will after him, as he was walking away with dignity. "You can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Gus Wilson. I don't keep the curl of a pig's tail for a chap like you. If I am a street vagabond I've got a heart as big as your body and soul together."

Mr. Wilson turned back, as red as a beet in the face. Something in the flash of Will's eye, and his sturdy, independent air, warned the incensed man, or there might have been a very undignified struggle in the store.

"I see, my lad," he said, slowly and with bitter emphasis, "that store-keeping is not in your vein. Come back to the office. I will have you paid off, and will give you a character for your next situation."

He was a different man, now, in his cool, studied bitterness, than he had been in the flush of anger. Will knew that Mr. Wilson had full authority to discharge him, but not a jot cared he. He was not going to be got rid of so easily.

"I ain't taking a discharge just now, Gus Wilson," he said, defiantly. "Maybe you don't know who you're talkin' to, or you'd haul in your horns several feet. If you go playin' that dodge on me, if I don't put a ring in your nose that'll lead you around like a calf, then sell me out."

Will walked swaggeringly away, with a glance over the shoulder at his opponent, that seemed to have more effect on that individual than his words.

He stood looking after the boy with a perplexed air, the red gradually dying out of his visage, and a slight pallor taking its place.

Breaking from his momentary reverie, he walked hastily back to the office, paying no further attention to Will, who stood some distance back, coolly regarding him.

"That shot struck between wind and water," said the boy, with a grimace. "But no man sha'n't say here that I don't earn my grub. There's enough here to turn my hand to."

As he was passing the office on his way back into the store, the door of Mr. Leonard's room opened, and his name was called.

"Wonder if Gus has been at work a-ready?" he said to himself. "If he has, he'll find it ain't no baby he's waked up. He wants something for his liver, he does, and I'm just his doctor."

But the chief clerk was busily engaged at his own desk, as Will went through the counting-room, and Mr. Leonard simply wished to send him on an errand to the post-office.

"Counted them Milton cloths last night and this morning," said Will. "Ain't reported yet."

"But I sent you word that you need not count them," replied Mr. Leonard. "That was attended to during your absence. I requested Mr. Johnson to tell you not to mind it."

"You told me to do it, and I always obey orders from head-quarters," said Will, positively, "especially when folks think I've been playin' off and not doin' enough."

"You tried me a little yesterday, Will," said the merchant, in a kindly tone. "I told you I was in haste, and yet you loitered on my errand. Do not do so again. So you made a second count of the cloths?"

"Bet I did."

"Well, it is better to do too much than too little. How many pieces did you make them?"

"Ninety-seven."

"I don't think you have done your work very carefully, Will," said the merchant, smiling. "Here is the invoice, you see. One hundred pieces. And here is Joe Ware's tally. He has marked it correct."

"I don't keer three cents for Joe Ware's tally," said Will, balancing himself on the arm of a chair. "I counted them goods, and here's my tally. If it ain't O. K. I'll eat an elephant."

Mr. Leonard looked curiously at the straggling array of marks on the unclean scrap of paper which Will had given him.

"I can't make anything of this," he said.

"Because your education has been neglected. You don't understand shorthand countin'," replied Will. "It foots up ninety-seven, and I'll punch Joe Ware's head if he says I lie. I ain't much of a reader, but I can count the straightest streak you ever seen."

"But the pieces would not fit evenly in the boxes, if any of them was short," said Mr. Leonard.

"Nor they don't, neither," persisted Will. "You never seen such packing."

"That will do, Will. Leave your tally there, and be off on your errand. I am glad to see you are so diligent."

With a flush of pleasure Will left the office and the store.

He had scarcely disappeared when his employer hastily rose, and opening the door of the office, called Mr. Johnson.

"Do you think Joe Ware was correct in his count of those Milton cloths?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Johnson, in surprise. "I never knew him to make a mistake."

"Yet I would prefer to have them counted again. Please go into the basement yourself, and keep the account of them while one of the men removes them from the cases."

"Very well, sir," replied Mr. Johnson, leaving the office in great astonishment. Such an order had never been given before during his years of service with Mr. Leonard. There was obviously something wrong.

The merchant turned again to his papers. But he was restless and uneasy. He seemed to make no headway with his work.

Mr. Johnson was absent for a considerable time, during which the merchant pushed aside his work pell-mell and rose and paced the floor of his office. His mind was evidently in an unsettled state.

Will returned and delivered the stamps and envelopes he had been sent for, and passed out again to his duties in the store, with a sharp glance at his restless employer.

Finally Mr. Johnson made his appearance.

"Well, sir, what result?" asked the merchant, hastily.

"It is the strangest thing," said Mr. Johnson; "I cannot account for it."

"That is no answer," replied Mr. Leonard, in quick tones. "What is the result of your count?"

"Ninety-seven pieces," was Mr. Johnson's reply.

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Leonard, seating himself nervously. "Can there be no mistake?"

"Ninety-seven is correct."

"How were they packed? But I need not ask that, as they have been twice disturbed before."

"There is one piece short in each of three cases," said Mr. Johnson.

"This is a very mysterious business," replied the merchant, seriously. "Yesterday afternoon they were all correct. This morning they are three pieces short. What can have occurred in the night? There is no evidence of burglary. The store was firmly closed this morning."

"It was, sir. I never heard of a stranger business. Nothing of the kind has ever happened here before."

"Never been found out here before would be more correct," said Mr. Leonard.

"Why, sir, do you think such things have been going on previously?" asked Mr. Johnson, in greater astonishment.

"I do not know what to think," replied the merchant. "May not the three pieces have been removed this morning? Perhaps a sale may have been made. I wish you would make full inquiry through the store."

Mr. Johnson did so, and returned with the word that no one had touched them.

"Call Will here!" said Mr. Leonard, in quick tones. His nervous manner was quite gone. Assurance had taken the place of doubt.

He wrote hastily, folded and sealed the note.

"Take this to the Central Station," he said to Will. "Ask for Mr. Fitler, and deliver it into his hands."

"And if I don't find him in?"

"Inquire where he is and hunt him up. I wish him to have it as soon as possible."

"There won't no grass grow under my feet," said Will, setting his cap jauntily. "Not on the Philadelphia pavements anyhow."

"Come with me into the basement, Mr. Johnson," said the merchant. "I wish to take a look around."

It was surprising what a number of the employees had business in the basement just then.

Mr. Johnson's inquiries had filled the store with a rumor of something wrong in that locality, and curiosity was rife.

Most of them had errands up-stairs again after Mr. Leonard's appearance.

The basement was a long, dimly-lighted room, broken here and there by iron columns which sustained the upper floors. It was well filled with cases of goods, all of which had been opened, and covered again to preserve them from dampness, though the room was thoroughly dry.

The long underground apartment was closely examined, and a smaller, dark sub-cell as well. Nothing was discovered. Everything appeared to be in its usual state. The windows and doors had not been disturbed. The mystery of the loss of the three pieces of cloth deepened.

The lower cellar was devoted to coal, empty cases and various occasional necessities. Its darkened walls were well cobwebbed. Its narrow apertures for light would scarcely have admitted a rat.

Mr. Leonard returned to his office in deep perplexity and concern.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO LOVERS.

IT was at a later hour that same day that our young friend, Willful Will, met unexpectedly with Miss Arlington, the lady whose acquaintance he had made the previous day.

She was walking quietly along Seventh street, a little-frequented avenue, and seemed as if expecting some one. There were indications of a slight petulance at his or her failure to appear.

"Hello!" cried Will, under his breath. "Seems to me I've seen that figure-head afore. Blest if it ain't the gal that shook me yesterday! Isn't she got up gallus?"

The young lady, whose rich and tasteful dress brought this exclamation from Will, recognized him at once as he advanced.

A smile crossed her face as she remembered the close of their former interview.

"Hope you're not too proud to speak to a feller," said Will, as he walked boldly up. "Tain't in the

woods we are now, that's sure; but if you can box a chap's ears there you can speak to him here."

"I don't think you deserve to be spoken to," she answered, "after your conduct yesterday."

"I dunno anything I done that wasn't right to the mark," said Will with a look of surprise. "If I stepped over the line anywhere I'm just the feller to step back ag'in."

"What did I box your ears for?" asked Miss Arlington, as Will walked gravely on beside her to her seeming amusement.

"For fun maybe," he replied. "I couldn't see nothing I done. Guess you thought you had a country cove."

"I thought I had a ripe specimen of city culture," she replied laughing. "No country boy had ever graduated in impudence as you had. You did not get half what you deserved."

"I don't take nothing for a gift," said Will, defiantly. "I always pay back. See if I don't give you the worth of your box."

"Why, you are not cherishing ill-feeling, I hope?"

"No, but I'm death on gettin' square. I'll find out the chap that's sweet on you yet, and if I don't put a ring in his nose there's no use talking."

"That will do, sir," she replied, with some feeling. "We had better part here. I cannot permit you to use such language."

"Why, bless you, Jennie, I don't mean a speck of harm in it," said Will, laughing. " Didn't think you'd get your temper up so easy. I can't help no more being imperious than I can help breathing, and it don't take folks long to find that out. Best do what I said t'other day; give that chap his walking-papers and set your cap for me."

"Very well. I will let you know when I have made up my mind to that," she replied, stopping, as if to bring their interview to a close.

"All right, if you ain't goin' my way," said Will. "I'd like to spend the day and show you round town a bit, but I got biz'ness to tend to, and you'll have to let me off. Good-by. My respects to him."

Will was away like a shot, leaving her surprised that she had consented to be interviewed by a shop boy, and one speaking so impertinently and with such shocking English in the public streets.

Yet the street in which they stood was almost deserted, and in any case Will was respectably dressed, and far too handsome a lad to be so ill-trained.

So she solaced her pride; a commodity in which she was not lacking. Was it not her duty to recognize and strive to train this rough-spoken yet well-meaning boy.

There was something behind all this in Jennie Arlington's mind. She was drawn to Will Somers by an attraction whose nature it would have been difficult for her to define, but which was none the less strong for her ignorance of its origin.

It was not alone that he was so young and so handsome that she had condescended to listen to and answer his rude speeches. No one else would have dared talk to her in such a strain. Yet there was some sense of sympathy between her soul and his that gave him impunity.

She found herself questioning the origin of this unusual feeling as she walked slowly on, and was puzzled at finding herself unable to account for it.

"Ain't many gals like her in this village," soliloquized Will. "A rich and proud one enough, I'll bet, but she lets me talk to her straight from the shoulder. Dunno how it is but I've got a queer kind o' hankering after her. Tain't what they call fallin' in love. That's not my lay. But she's got the upper hold on my fancy somehow, and I'll swow if I know how— Haloo! Wonder if that's the particlker chap now? There's some feller jist jined her. Bet I've seen him afore, too. Like to turn back and twig the cut of his jib, but it wouldn't be on the square. Guess I'll toddle on."

The person who had joined the young lady was a gentleman of attractive appearance. He was of good build, and had an engaging face, the expression of his full gray eyes and well-formed mouth being that of great frankness. He was dressed neatly, but with no effort at display. He seemed, in fact, to have left his business for this interview, and to be in his store dress.

Their greeting displayed much warmth, and an animated conversation ensued between them. A half-hour afterward found them enjoying ices in a neighboring restaurant, and still busily conversing.

"And when will you be out to see me, John?" she asked, with a look in her eyes as if her heart hung upon his answer.

"Not for a week or so," he replied, in a rich baritone voice. "I am eager enough, but we are just now unduly busy in the store."

"And business is of more account than love, no doubt!"

"Business cannot be laid aside. Love may be postponed," he said, calmly. But the look in his eye contradicted his quiet tone. He evidently had the strongest affection for the petulantly-speaking young lady.

"Now you are a vexation, John Elkton," she replied, with a tinge of red in her face. "And I believe you are just trying to vex me. How can you talk so?"

"What shall I say?" he replied, laughing. "Shall I declare that I pray for the wings of the morning that I may fly to your side, and for the glance of the sun that I might see you always? Do you want a plain like me to turn poet."

"Love makes poets of plain men, they say," she replied, softly. "Why should it not teach you passion, which is poetry?"

"It does, Jennie," he said, with equal softness of tone. "I can think it if I cannot speak it. But we are touching on forbidden topics in a place like this. Some one may hear us."

She looked round with a quick glance, fearful that they might have been overheard. There were several other parties in the saloon, but none within earshot.

"They would be sure to call us simpering fools," she said, smiling. "That is all the encouragement that love-making gets from the great, cold-hearted public. Can't you come out on Sunday? The country is beautiful now."

"I will do my best," he replied. "I am likely to spend the day stupidly enough in the city. I have an engagement with a young man which I hope he may kindly break."

"Send him word that you have an engagement with a young lady that is unbreakable."

"I have sent him that word a half-dozen times already. That excuse has lost its freshness," he said, laughing. "I fear I will have to be martyred."

"Just wait," she answered, shaking her finger at him. "I will teach you better, some day, than to make stupid engagements."

"When our wedding-day comes, Jennie," he said, tenderly, "I will make a permanent engagement. Your word will be law, and no male stupidity shall step between us."

"Yes, that's the way all the men talk," she replied, gayly. "Those are splendid resolutions, but they won't wear. I have been making a study of married men. How about the promise you made me for today?"

"The promise? What promise?"

"There, if he has not gone and forgotten already!" She shook her head in affected surprise. "The forfeit you owe me. You were to pay it to-day. Don't you know that is all I came in town for?"

"I wish you had been with me to jog my memory, for it has wandered," he replied. "I thought it was a sheer desire to see my handsome face that brought you in."

"Now, you tease!" she exclaimed, turning away. "But the forfeit? You shall not get off so easily."

"Let me see if I have not some gift for you in my pocket," he said, gravely. "It is a perilous thing to eat philomenas with a lady. I should have known better."

He emptied the contents of his pockets on the table.

"A knife, a pencil, a price-list, a button, that sure emblem of bachelorthood. What shall I give my love?" He whistled in a low tone as he ran over an inventory of his pocket treasures.

"Not a knife, for true love's sake. It is the worst of signs."

"You put trust in signs, then? I should give you a lover's knot," he replied, as he continued jokingly to investigate his pockets. "Ah! I have it. Here is just the thing. The making of a bow, which you can wear and think of me."

"I keep thinking of you without a bow," she replied. "But I will take it if you lack of something better. What a lovely shade! Did you choose that on purpose for me?"

He had drawn a strip of delicately-colored silk from his pocket.

"I might as well take the credit of it," he replied. "I know you ladies think the men are no judges of colors, but you see my taste there. Will that pay my forfeit?"

"Certainly," she replied, as she twined the silk round her hand and admired its play of color. "You are forgiven. I will make me a bow that will rouse the envy of all the ladies, and the admiration of all the gentlemen. But there, our ice is all afloat. Mr. Price will take it as a personal insult if we disdain his ices in this way."

"And I must return to the store. The voice of the siren has lured me away too long."

"I wish you could be lured away oftener," she replied. "You are infatuated with that stupid old business. I do believe you prefer it to me." She gave him a humorous look as they left the saloon in company.

"It only has my head and hands, Jennie. It has not my heart," he replied. His tone had that softness which only love can give.

They were now in the open street. Love-making must now confine itself to eye-glances and farewell pressure of the hands.

Meanwhile Will had proceeded on his errand, meeting with another adventure in doing so.

On reaching the crossing at Eighth and Arch streets an old gentleman was just in advance of him. There was a line of vehicles. Trying to get through between them he was struck by a horse and thrown to the ground. He fell in such a position that he would inevitably have been run over by the wheels of the loaded wagon had not Will sprung hastily forward, and dragged him off the track.

"Come, old gentleman," he said, as he assisted the old man to his feet. "Tain't safe for you to be walking among wagon-wheels. Hope you ain't hurt."

He was industriously brushing the dust from the clothes of the fallen man. The latter was a well-dressed and rather handsome person, though showing plainly the advances of age.

"I am not hurt. I thank you for your quickness and kindness," he said, as he looked Will searchingly in the face. "Where do you live, my boy? I must see you again."

"I ain't living now, I'm only staying," said Will, as he brushed off the last speck of dirt.

"And where are you staying?"

"Wherever folks will let me."

"Are you engaged in business?"

"Yes."

"What business, and where?"

"Running a wholesale dry good store. No use saying where, 'cept you want to buy."

"I want to know more of you, my lad, and to re-

ward you for your kindness. Why will you not inform me?"

"Cause most of folks think they know too much of me now, and I'm afraid that'd be your luck. And I ain't taking rewards just now."

Will was off without giving time for an answer. The old gentleman called a boy to him, and engaged him to follow his rescuer, and report at a place mentioned. Will was not going to escape his gratitude so easily.

CHAPTER IX. THE TELL-TALE CLEW.

MR. LEONARD was in quite a serious mood as he sat that evening in the spacious library of his elegant home. Supper had been gone through, as a matter of form, but without his usual hearty appetite. Now the evening paper had lost its charm for him, and after vainly striving to interest himself in its contents, he flung it down and nervously paced the floor.

The room he occupied was charmingly appointed. Bookcases in rich foreign woods, well-filled with tasteful volumes, alternated with fine pictures and suggestive bits of statuary, gave the room an aspect which only combined culture and wealth could produce. A richly-colored carpet covered the floor. The ceiling was painted with a border of trailing vines, and an intricate centerpiece. An elegant chandelier in bronze hung over the wide center-table, which was covered with delicate bits of ornament, utilized as inkstands, paper-weights, etc.

This was Mr. Leonard's favorite room. Here he spent most of his evenings, and here the family were apt to follow him, leaving the more pretentious rooms below for company purposes.

He had been a widower now for about a year, and his present family consisted of his ward, Jennie Arlington, of a son and daughter, both as yet quite young, and of a matronly maiden aunt, who filled the responsible position of housekeeper.

She was too old-fashioned to entertain company, and on Jennie were thrown the labor and the pleasure of entertainment. Fortunately none could have been better fitted to do the honors of the elegant mansion. Despite her youthfulness, she had that womanly tact which makes natural entertainers sometimes of mere children in years.

Since the death of Mrs. Leonard, an invalid of many years' standing, she had drifted into this position, and was a prime favorite with her guardian, whose solitary hours she had done much to enliven.

"And what ails Uncle Harry to-night?" she asked, confronting him in his restless stride.

By this title she had always been used to call him, though there was really no relationship between them. He had become her guardian, and taken her as a member of his family, at the request of an old friend by whom she had been raised, and who had left her a good share of his fortune, though even he was but an adopted father. There was some mystery, known only to Mr. Leonard, about her origin.

"Nothing, child," he said, somewhat querulously. "Some business bother, that is all. Sit down to your book, and I will walk my nerves into quietness in five minutes."

"But you always leave business at the store," she said, persistently. "I never knew business yet to affect your appetite or unsettle your nerves."

"I suspect I am getting old and uneasy," he answered, with a forced laugh. "You must look for more whims from me in the future."

"I think I will take a walk, too, uncle," she replied, taking his arm. "But, you really go too fast; I cannot follow such a stride as that."

"If you get in my carriage you must travel at my speed," he said, laughing. "You are a little pest, Jennie. I wish you would let me alone."

"Your hair wants smoothing," she said, stroking his abundant locks. "Sit down and let me put it into shape. It is tossed like a lion's mane."

"Well, well, I suppose I will have to give in. A man cannot enjoy his troubles in any comfort where you are."

"It was bothers a minute ago. Now it is troubles. What will it be next, I wonder?" she said, as she hovered about him, tastefully arranging his hair. "What has ruffled you, Uncle Harry? I want to know."

"So that you can tell your bosom friends, Miss Milton and Annie Jones?"

"My lips are sealed to silence, sir," she said, with mock dignity. "It is a secret, then? So much the better. I tote on secrets. I would not divulge it for an ocean of silver. What is it? Murder, arson, or burglary? Something delightfully horrible, I hope."

She looked the spirit of mischief, as she stood over him, in her gray evening dress, her black, wavy hair, and sparkling eyes in strong contrast, while a color sash, and a gay bow at her throat, broke the uniformity. It was the forfeit which her lover, John Elkton, had given her.

"I am in earnest, Jennie. I want you to be secret," he said, gravely. "Your last guess is the right one. It is a robbery that frets me."

"Robbery!" she cried, with parted lips. "Well, I declare! Was it serious? Was your store broken into last night?"

"Nothing so commonplace as that, or there would be no secret about it. There is a mystery connected with the affair which obliges us to be circumspect, lest we should put the villains on their guard."

"Well, really!" she cried, with childish excitement, taking a chair, and seating herself beside him. "Go on, uncle, I am so eager to learn all about it. Maybe I could be of some help."

"Not you, my child. It is a matter for police detectives. Even they are, as yet, at fault."

"Tell me quick! before Aunt Hannah comes in. You don't know what a talent I have for guessing. I may throw wonderful light upon it."

"Yes, a talent for guessing wrong," he said, smiling.

"Now hush, you bad omen!" she exclaimed, closing his lips with her hand. "But there, you are free. Say what you please; but tell me the mystery."

She had quite roused him from his abstraction. Laughing at her impatience, he proceeded to give her a description of the mysterious robberies that had been discovered in his store within the last few days.

This relation was interrupted by a dozen exclamations on her part.

"Now that is too strange," she cried, drawing her chair round, so that she directly fronted him. "I don't wonder you are worried. The thieves must be ever so shrewd. I won't begin to guess just yet. And such a loss, too! Those silks were very valuable?"

"Yes. They were of superior quality. I don't think there are any like them in the city."

"That may help them to find them, if they should be offered for sale."

In her eagerness she had leaned forward till her face was very near his.

"We have hopes in that direction," he replied.

"But—what—where did you get that?"

His face had suddenly become pallid. He was pointing with trembling finger at her throat.

"What?" she asked, drawing hastily back with a frightened look.

"That! That bow!"

"Why, what ails it? It is very pretty, I'm sure."

"Where did you get it?" he cried, starting up, and seizing her wrist in his excitement, while he eagerly scrutinized the innocent ornament.

"I do not know what you mean, uncle," she exclaimed, drawing her wrist from his too severe grip.

"It is a piece of the silk of the stolen silk! I tell you," he ejaculated, in strong excitement. "You may have the clew there to the robbery. Where did you get it?"

"The stolen silk! It cannot be!"

"It is. There is no doubt of it."

This was a dreadful revelation. She sunk back in her chair, a deep pallor coming upon her face, until its hue was almost deathly. A thousand fearful contingencies crossed her mind in that one dread minute.

"But you have not answered, Jennie."

Nor did she yet answer. Her face grew even whiter. She covered it with her hands, with a shuddering motion that surprised and pained him.

The strong man looked down upon the girl, almost cowering before him. With a sudden impulse he seized her hands and drew them from her face, looking with a searching glance into her affrighted eyes.

"Where did you get it? Why do you not answer?"

"I cannot tell you."

It was a strained, unnatural voice that spoke.

"You cannot?" His tones vibrated with surprise and dread. "What shall I understand by this strange action? Answer me! You must! You shall!"

"Oh, uncle!" she exclaimed, in agony, again covering her face. "Ask me not. It is impossible that I should answer."

"Why, are you crazy, Jennie?"

"No, no! Let me go! Give me time to think!"

"You know the robber, girl. He has been giving you part of his stolen goods. I must have his name."

"I do not know him! I could not tell you now if I did."

"Was it that boy I sent here yesterday?"

"That boy?" she asked, doubtfully, as a sudden dishonorable thought shot across her mind.

"Yes! It was he! He gave you the silk!" He spoke with a tone of conviction,

"I will not answer! I will answer nothing! Not now! I must have time to think!"

With a quick, stooping motion she broke from him, and darted out of the door of the room, her black hair streaming behind her, her pallid, scared face haunting him as if he had seen a specter.

CHAPTER X.

A CONFERENCE.

MR. LEONARD and the officer were closeted in close conversation. On this occasion the latter was in his ordinary dress. The fact of the loss of the three pieces of cloth was known throughout the store, and there was no need of secrecy in this interview.

"The whole affair is growing more and more mixed," he said, after listening gravely to Mr. Leonard. "The clew lays somewhere in your own store, but it will take time to get hold of the end of it. The parties are very shrewd."

"I can scarcely imagine any of my young men as being dishonest," said the merchant. "I have trusted them all, time and again."

"And perhaps been robbed for years past. There is an accomplice here, I tell you, of some party of rascals outside. Have you had your books looked over to learn if there have been former robberies of this kind?"

"No, but I will," was the energetic answer. "I can soon find if the sales of goods tally with the inventories."

"We have been able, so far, to get no trace of the custom-house robbers. The only description to be had of them might apply to fifty persons we meet every day. They are not professionals; that I am sure of. I know all that set of worthies, and their

modes of operation. These are outside hands, but very keen ones."

"And the forged check?"

"Was presented by the same person," replied the officer. "The bank teller has no recollection of the party, but the handwriting in the check and in the warehouse entry are the same."

"It is strange—very strange," said Mr. Leonard, abstractedly, as he selected several invoices from a pile of them he had taken from his safe.

"I am going to try the suggestion you just made," he said, proceeding to the door.

"Harry!" he called, into the counting-room.

One of the clerks responded, coming into the room.

"I wish you to take these invoices," said the merchant, "and compare them with the sales of these special goods. They are the first we have had of these styles, and the salesbook should show whether they have all been disposed of or not."

"There are none of these left in stock," replied the clerk. "They must all have been sold. The sales must tally with the bills."

"Well, examine them, at any rate."

"I will," said Harry, leaving the office. His tone expressed surprise at this request.

"We will soon have that matter tested," said Mr. Leonard. "Those are the only goods I can think of which we have lately commenced to sell."

"It may prove something," said the officer; "but these thieves are very wide awake. They may confine themselves to regular lines of goods. In that case it will not be easy to trace them now."

"If the thief is in my store, I suppose he has considered all those points," said Mr. Leonard.

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Wilson.

"Excuse me," he said, coolly. "I did not know you were engaged. I have just been down to see Claxton."

"That will rest," said Mr. Leonard. "Sit down. We were talking over the mysterious robbery."

"Is there any clew yet?" he asked, earnestly.

"Not a shadow," said Mr. Fitler. "There is only this much very likely; that the thief is in this store."

"Can that be possible?" said Wilson, with perfect coolness. "And all here have been so fully trusted. Ifancy my suspicion of that boy will prove a just one, in the end."

"I fear it may," replied Mr. Leonard.

"I have not even let you escape in my investigations," said the officer, addressing Mr. Wilson.

"What do you mean?" asked the latter, hastily, with a slight tinge of color.

"I mean simply to turn every stone that lies in my way and see what is under it," said the officer, fixing his eyes upon him. "You were one of the parties having access to that safe, and control of the stolen warehouse order."

"But I was absent from the city, in Harrisburg," replied Mr. Wilson, a little hotly.

"You men seem to be no respecters of persons," said Mr. Leonard. "It is a wonder you did not try my complicity."

"It would not be the first time," said the officer, dryly. "I have caught a merchant, more than once, at robbing himself. We know no persons, only facts."

"Well, did you trace any guilt to me?" asked Mr. Wilson, smiling.

"I merely wrote to Harrisburg, to inquire if a man named Miles Sartain had died and been buried on certain days named, and if one Augustus Wilson had attended the funeral; that is all."

"You were inquisitive indeed," said Wilson, in a light tone. "I was there."

"Yes. So I have learned. You must remember, sir, that I know nobody in this matter. If I got you in my vice, I would squeeze you as tightly as the meanest man in the store."

"I hope to keep out of your vice, then," said Wilson, laughing.

"So as the case now stands," said Mr. Leonard, "we have absolutely no clew?"

"We have hold of one or two threads only, but there is nothing visible yet at the ends of them."

"I have been more fortunate, then. I have found some positive evidence. It is not yet fully located, however."

"How is that?" asked Mr. Fitler, quickly. He was at once full of eager attention, his keen eyes on the speaker's face.

"I have traced a piece of the silk into the possession of a member of my own household. No less a person than my ward, Miss Arlington."

"Ha!" cried Mr. Wilson, in deep surprise. "How in the world did she obtain it? This is strange enough."

"She had learned my suspicions first, and refused to tell me. There was some one she evidently did not wish to implicate. Remember that I tell you this in confidence. It is to go no further, except as I may direct."

"Then why mention it at all, if you are not ready to make use of it?" asked the officer.

"Because I want your suggestions. I will not press her to reveal her secret, but we may guess at it."

"It is a mighty odd thing. A bit of silk strayed already into your own house. Was she using it in any way?"

"Yes, as a bow."

"Then she didn't fancy there was anything wrong about it. She may have bought it."

"No. She did not buy it."

"Is there no other silk of the same pattern in the city?"

"There is not."

"Very odd that she should make a secret of it."

"Could she have communicated with any person from the store?" asked Wilson.

"With nobody, I think, except the boy, Will. I

sent him out to my house the other day, and he had an interview with her."

"It is just as I thought. Everything points to that boy," said Wilson.

"I thought so myself," said Mr. Leonard. "I expressed my doubts of the boy, and she made no denial."

"Did she admit anything?" asked the officer.

"No. She would not answer."

"The boy may be used as a scapegoat. When did you first see the bow?"

"Last evening."

"And has the lady been away from home since the robbery?"

"She was in the city yesterday."

"Now we are coming to it," said Mr. Fitler, straightening himself up. "Who is there in the city that she would be likely to wish to screen in such a case? What bosom friend among the ladies, or what particular friend among the gentlemen?"

"Miss Arlington is engaged to be married. The gentleman is in business in the city. But he is above suspicion."

"What a very poor detective you would make," said Mr. Fitler, impatiently. "It is the theory of our office, sir, that nobody is above suspicion. If any man gets himself in doubt he has got to explain it, that's all. This man may be as innocent as she is. What we want is to trace where he got the silk. Who is he?"

"His name is John Elkton. He holds a position in the store of White & Bradley."

"They are dry goods operators, too?"

"They deal in nearly the same line of goods as I do."

"Elkton holds what position?"

"That of their principal salesman."

"What time yesterday was Miss Arlington in the city?"

"In the afternoon."

"Between what hours?"

"I cannot say exactly. Probably from two to five."

"You must find out more definitely. I will try and learn at what hours yesterday Mr. Elkton was out of the store. We need to establish the fact of an interview."

"I don't think there is much doubt of that."

"I want to have no doubt of it. This matter must be traced from Miss Arlington to somebody that we can handle without gloves."

"You will find nothing wrong about John Elkton," said Mr. Leonard, decisively. "You may imagine that I knew him well before consenting to this engagement. He is a first-class man. Had I thought that the silk came from him I would not have spoken of it."

"You are sure it was your silk?"

"Positively sure."

"Then you would have acted very foolishly. Little headway we would make if we were so tender of people as that. Here is a positive clew, and you would throw it away because you know the man it points to. We want to see it pointing somewhere. If he can put us on another track, well and good. If he cannot, the worse for him."

Mr. Leonard looked as if something had left a bad taste in his mouth.

"Can we trust nobody?" he asked.

"No. Everybody needs to be tried."

"I agree with you there," said Wilson.

"That is all we can do just now," said the officer. "I would like to take a turn in your cellar. That cloth robbery is the strangest part of the whole business."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CELLAR.

MR. LEONARD and his visitor proceeded together to the basement of the establishment. They were followed by Mr. Wilson.

The officer paused on reaching the foot of the stairs, and took a general view of the long room.

"You keep some valuable goods down here?" he asked.

"Not our most valuable. Principally heavy goods."

"Have any of these other cases been examined? Your visitors may not have confined their attention to the one line of goods."

"No. They were all broken, and would not show tampering so easily. Had I better have them all examined?"

"That you'll have to settle yourself," said Mr. Fitler, smiling. "It might be best for your peace of mind not to know all you have lost."

"I'd rather know the whole truth."

"And I'd like to know," replied the officer, "who it is that can carry out bales of goods through keyholes?"

He was walking now down the room, his keen eyes wandering from side to side, noting every detail.

"Do those goods come in that rumpled condition?" he asked, stopping beside a case of light dress goods.

"They don't look as smooth as they might, that's a fact," said Wilson, as he partly opened a roll of the stuff. It was somewhat creased and wrinkled.

They had fallen upon a portion of Will's bed, which he had rolled up again rather hastily.

"I think I will have these few cases recounted," said Mr. Leonard. "They are new goods, and we can easily tell what sales have been made from them. Send Mr. Brown down here, and Will," he called up the stairs.

While he was waiting for the appearance of these parties, and putting them to work, Mr. Fitler walked on, continuing his investigation. He examined the

Will Somers.

windows at the end of the room with the greatest care.

"These have not been disturbed," he said. "No thief has entered this way."

"How can you tell that?" asked Mr. Wilson. "If they had a confederate in the store the windows might have been unfastened on the inside, so they could be easily removed. They could have been re-fastened the next day."

"It is only two or three nights since the robbery," said the officer. "These windows have not been meddled with these three weeks."

"How can you tell that?" asked Wilson, anxiously.

"By the cobwebs which you see here across the frame. The windows could not be opened without breaking them."

"I see. But they may have been of yesterday's make."

"I should judge they were a month old," said the officer. "The spiders have abandoned them you see. Notice, too, that dust has settled on the delicate lines. Dust doesn't get in here easily."

"Not very," replied Wilson.

"The thieves did not enter by the windows, that's clear," said the officer. "What arrangement have you in front?"

"An elevator to lower goods down."

"Opening on Market street?"

"Yes."

"And how secured?"

"By iron doors, which are locked at night."

"That could not safely be used," said the officer, "even if left unlocked. Market street is too public, at any hour of the night, for heavy operations like these. The door at the head of the stairs is always locked at night?"

"I think so. Those are my orders," said Mr. Leonard, joining them.

The officer had proceeded to the front of the store and was examining the elevator.

"No chance there," he said.

"But how then did they enter?" asked Mr. Leonard, anxiously. "They must have found some means of access from without."

"They must have made entry into the store in some way, and then have worked down to the cellar."

"We have examined the doors and windows. They do not seem to have been tampered with."

"I will take a look at them," said the officer.

"Who opens the store in the morning?"

"Mr. Brown, the man you see at work there, usually."

"And closes it at night, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Does he come and go alone?"

"No. There are several leave the store together."

"He may return. Where does Mr. Brown live?"

"In the upper part of the city. Now don't be throwing out insinuations about this man, Mr. Fitter. I can vouch for his honesty."

This conversation was kept up in a low tone, so as not to reach Mr. Brown's ears.

"You are too much inclined to vouch for people's honesty," said the officer, dryly. "We will never get along if everybody is taken for granted to be honest."

"And we will never get along if we spend our time in following false scents," said Mr. Leonard, a little sharply. "I have had the man in my employment for years, and know him thoroughly."

"Does anybody else carry the keys?"

"Occasionally. But Brown had them on the night of the robbery."

"It's a mighty odd business," said the officer.

He walked back past where Mr. Brown and Will were busily engaged counting the goods. Mr. Fitter eyed the man closely. It was Will's old enemy, but they were amicably engaged now. A nervous, quick-motioned, sharp-speaking person, whose worst fault was his temper.

"I think Brown is all right," was the officer's silent comment, after a long look at the man's face.

"You have a cellar under this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilson. "Devoted to coal, empty boxes, and rubbish generally. It has no entrance, except from here."

"We will go down," said the officer.

"It is rather dark there," said Mr. Leonard. "We will need a light. Will, get a lamp, and follow us into the cellar."

"All right," said Will, dropping a piece of goods with a thump on the floor. "I'll put you through."

They proceeded to the sub-cellars, Will following down the stairs with a lighted lamp. It was a long, dark room, imperfectly lighted by two very narrow windows at the back. In front a coal vault extended under the pavement. This was empty now of coal, and its iron grating fastened down from within.

As Mr. Wilson had said, the cellar was half-filled with rubbish. Its stone walls had been whitewashed, but were brown enough now, their mortar eaten with dampness. The earth floor was rather yielding, as if from dampness.

Mr. Fitter's eyes noted everything, as he walked slowly back.

"Bring the light here," he said, at length, as they came near the rear wall. He stooped and picked up something from the floor.

"Who made those footprints?" he asked, pointing to two very faint indentations in an unusually soft portion of the floor.

They all looked down with interest, Will holding the light close. The shape of a foot could be plainly made out.

"That's a reg'lar Robinson Crusoe find," said Will. "If we was only on a desert island now we might look for Indians, or such customers."

"Here we can look for rogues," said the officer. "It is a small foot," he continued, examining with great care.

"About the size of the boy's shoe," said Wilson, looking sharply at Will's feet. "Set your foot here."

"Oh, you dry up," said Will, angrily. "I ain't measuring feet now. Maybe I made it. I was down here yesterday. So was more of the men."

"No impudence, Will," said Mr. Leonard, reprovingly.

"Can't help it," said Will, defiantly. "Impudence was born in me, and it will work loose. Can't keep it down."

He turned away with a vexed shrug, and walked toward where something had attracted his attention.

"Who dropped this?" asked the officer, displaying the object he had picked up.

It was a small copper token, about the size of a nickel cent.

"That's mine," said Will, returning. "I missed it and didn't know what come of it."

"Then you were down here," said Wilson. "And those are your footprints."

"I didn't say they weren't," said Will, indifferently.

"Then why do you object to measuring?"

"Cause that would look too much as if I was taking my measure for a thief. That's a game I ain't playing. Spose I might have made the steps, 'cause I was down here."

Mr. Fitter was closely examining the remainder of the cellar.

"Everything seems right here," he said. "A rat could hardly get into this place. What's that you have?" he asked, addressing Will.

"A bit of paper I found while you was talkin' here. Picked it up from under the box."

It was a strip of writing paper which Will handed the officer, seemingly a fragment of a letter.

The latter examined it by the light of the lamp. It contained a few lines of writing.

"It has not been there many days," he said. "It is hardly dampened."

His countenance changed as he slowly read the faintly-written correspondence.

"This may be important," he said.

"How does it read?" asked Mr. Leonard, looking curiously over his shoulder.

"Read it," said the officer, handing it to him.

"There is very little of it left," said Mr. Leonard, perusing it.

— Monday, at sharp 8. Black-eyed Joe's mill the crib. The swag is safe, and samples put out. They are fighting shy. Now's our time to hove, before the scent gets hot. J. P.

"I didn't ask you to read it aloud," said Mr. Fitter. "Such information had best not get to many ears."

"Information?" repeated Mr. Leonard. "A riddle. I should call it."

"It is a riddle with an easy key," said the officer, dryly. "I wish I knew who Black-eyed Joe was. I never heard of that gentleman before. Where did you get this, Will?"

"Just under the edge of the dry-goods box there."

Mr. Fitter examined the spot carefully. There were no other suspicious indications.

"It is deuced queer," he said, reflectively, "for that piece of letter to be down here. I've been of the notion that burglars got into the upper part of your store and worked their way down to the basement. But what did they want down here? This adds a new mystery to a queer case."

"Under the supposition of a confederate in the store, might he not have dropped it by accident when down here on his regular business?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"Yes," said the officer, abstractedly.

He took the paper again, and attentively read it.

"What does it mean? It is all Greek to me," said Mr. Leonard.

"It means that an appointment for a meeting of the gentlemen who have been visiting you has been made. The Monday night has passed, or it might be next Monday. The meeting is fixed for Black-eyed Joe's, wherever that is. 'The swag is safe.' That is your silk, which they are trying to dispose of by samples. 'Fighting shy' simply means that you are keeping the affair quiet, and it is their plan to sell the goods to some innocent buyer, if they can before the robbery is made public."

"Well, that makes it clearer," said Mr. Leonard.

"Another point. I believe this is the same handwriting as we have already been tracing. J. P. may be another clew. Wish I knew who Black-eyed Joe was."

"And may not the piece of silk Miss Arlington had be one of these samples?"

"Likely enough," said Mr. Fitter walking toward the stairs.

CHAPTER XII.

A REJECTED SUIT.

JENNIE ARLINGTON did not readily recover from the shock which had been given her. Mr. Leonard had not again mentioned the subject of the lost silk, but she imagined that his mind was filled with doubt and suspicion. She was quiet, but he saw and respected her distress. He gave up the idea that she had obtained the silk from Will. It must have been from somebody near and dear to her. Most probably from John Elkton.

Mr. Fitter had inquired concerning him, and learned that he had been absent from the store during the hour that Miss Arlington was in town. This seemed to confirm their suspicions. The inquiry seemed narrowing down. But the mode of

operation of the thieves remained as mysterious as ever, and Mr. Leonard retained his confidence in John Elkton's honesty. The detective remarked:

"There is one point in his favor, that of the samples mentioned in the letter. If he can show where and how he got the silk, well and good. After the worse for him. If I but knew who J. P. was, and where to find Black-eyed Joe, I would sleep easier."

Will, who happened to overhear this remark, smiled intelligently to himself.

"Bet what you dare that I find him first," he muttered. "Got a notion in my top-knot that I'll tend that meetin' next Monday."

Jennie Arlington sat disconsolately at a window in Mr. Leonard's library. She was not alone. Mr. Augustus Wilson occupied a chair by her. They had been conversing for a short time.

"It is a distressing affair to Mr. Leonard," he said. "This thing of finding himself robbed of valuable goods, on every side, and quite unable to trace the thief, is a source of great annoyance, and may prove ruinous in the end."

"I know it, Mr. Wilson," she replied, "and wish I could help it."

"You may be able to do something to help it," he said, significantly.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, with a sudden flashing up.

"Simply that Mr. Leonard saw a piece of the lost silk in your possession. You may, then, have it in your power to put us on the track of these mysterious thieves."

"Did Mr. Leonard send you out here to question me about this?"

"No, I came of my own motion."

"Then you can return of your own motion. I have no information for you."

"Mr. Leonard seems to think that you got it from the boy, Will Somers."

"Does he?" she asked, coldly.

Her visitor's sharp glance could detect a nervous ness beneath her apparent ease.

"Yes. I might have given him a different idea of the case, but thought it best to keep silent."

"What view of the case?" she asked, driving hard to be collected.

"I know, Miss Arlington, as well as yourself, that you did not get the silk from the boy. I know, as well as you, where it came from. I can appreciate your wish to keep silent, but something is due to Mr. Leonard."

"You assume to know a great deal," she said, defiantly.

"Not much assumption about it," he coolly replied. "The thing is patent on its face. All that surprises me is that Mr. Leonard is blind to the fact. John Elkton gave you the silk."

"I suppose you think that a very shrewd guess?" she said, haughtily, her cheek reddening.

"I did not come here to make guesses," he replied. "I made myself sure before coming that he was the man, and also that he is unwilling or unable to explain his possession of that dangerous article. The affair looks dark for him."

"Did you ask him such questions?" she replied. "And get such answers from him?"

"I did not speak to him at all. I had other and better means of arriving at the truth. We have to copy the shrewdness of the professional detective in cases like this, Miss Arlington."

"I wonder you don't hire yourself out as a detective," she said, satirically. "You seem to have a talent in that direction. You have been remarkably successful in finding, or inventing, evidence in this matter."

"There is no invention in it," he replied, with a sharp intonation. "John Elkton is the man, and you can't deny it."

"You seem very anxious to have me admit it," she replied, with evident anger. "I would like to know your object, sir, in coming here and questioning me in regard to this business!"

"It was to serve you I came. I care nothing for John Elkton. I have learned some suspicious facts about him, which seem to point plainly to his connection with the thieves. Duty to Mr. Leonard should have made me tell him these facts. But I know how you feel toward this man, and wished to save you from distress by coming here first."

"John Elkton is no thief, as you insinuate," she cried, red with anger. "I would much sooner believe such things of you than of him. I doubt if your honesty would weigh in the scale with his."

"Facts are stubborn things," he coolly replied. "I am not on trial now. He is. I would be sorry to have the evidence against my honesty that there is against his. You must excuse me for plain speaking. Miss Arlington. John Elkton was connected with the theft of that silk, and I have abundant proof of it."

"You have not, and you cannot have," she answered, rising, but leaning heavily upon her chair. "If you came here on purpose to insult me, I can only say that you have succeeded, and that this interview had better close. If you have any other purpose I would like you to put it in as few words as possible."

"I am sorry to have offended you," he replied. "I certainly had no such purpose as that. I came here to serve, instead of to annoy you."

"Serve me? In what way?" she asked. A pallor had replaced her flush.

"By keeping your secret. I alone have these proofs against John Elkton. I can suppress them. Of course I must aid Mr. Leonard in seeking the other thieves, but if the proofs in my possession are destroyed Elkton cannot be implicated. It is consideration for your feelings brings me here. I know you would not wish him to be held as a common felon."

"No, indeed!" she said, clutching the chair, nervously.

"I am aware of your relations with him, and how bitterly you would feel any such disgrace, as your betrothal is known to all your friends. Of course your engagement must be broken. You cannot continue tied to a man who is simply an unconvicted felon."

"You belie him, sir, and insult me by such remarks. John Elkton is no felon. He came by the silk honestly and can explain his possession of it."

"It is creditable in you to think so," was the quiet rejoinder. "He may have to explain it to the satisfaction of a jury, which will be no easy matter against the proofs I speak of. I care nothing for him, I care much for you, and wish to save you from disgrace. Your engagement can be quietly broken and the cause suppressed."

"You are very kind, Mr. Wilson," she said, turning a quick glance upon him. "What object have you in this?"

"Nothing but your good," he replied, in his slow, steady way. "I have your welfare so deeply at heart that I would run any risk or do any deed to aid you."

"Indeed!" she said. "I did not know I had so warm a friend in you."

"You did know it," he answered, abruptly. "You trifled with me now. You affect to forget our past intercourse, to forget that I opened the secret of my heart to you on a former occasion."

"Yes, I remember your making a goose of yourself by making love to me when I was but a child," she replied, with a curl of the lip. "I laughed at you then as I should laugh now at anything ridiculous."

"I loved you then, as I love you now," he said earnestly. "I forbore to press my claim when your fancy was turned elsewhere. I believe it was but a girl's fancy that drew you to John Elkton. That dream is past now. You are a woman, and are free. I have a right now to press the love that I have nursed in silence till it has grown too strong to suppress. I have a claim on you that gives me the right to speak of my affection."

"And did you come here to prate of your claims, and call it love-making?" she cried, indignantly. "To buy me with your unmasked offer of silence? I am not for sale, sir."

"You mistake me," he said, earnestly. "I would not for the world insult you. I love you. You are or will be free. May I not offer my sincere affection? May I not lay claim to this dear hand? I who have so long loved you in silence and hopelessness."

He attempted to take her hand, which she quickly withdrew. She still leaned upon her chair, with pallid face and set, compressed lips.

"When I am free I will let you know," she said, with a touch of sarcasm. "It would be well for you to suppress this sudden passion till then. I do not imagine that you will die young from the pangs of unrequited love. You are as cold and calculating as a mathematician in your love-making. I despise you too much to give a serious answer to such an unmanly and insulting suit."

She walked with a queenly step across the room toward the door.

"Very well, then," he cried, angrily. "You accept the other alternative. I will at once inform Mr. Leonard and the officers of what I have learned. Before this time to-morrow John Elkton shall be the tenant of a prison, and shall know that you have consigned him there."

"And do you think," she exclaimed, turning on him sharply and suddenly, "that I am such a weak and soulless woman as to desert the man I love because he has fallen victim to the schemes of a villain? Nay, more, that I would sell myself, body and soul, to that villain to save my betrothed? Do your worst, sir. I defy and scorn you. I would rather wed John Elkton in a prison than you in a palace. But I believe that you are a liar and a knave outright. You have no proofs. No man can show a stain on John Elkton's honesty. I shall counsel him to defy you."

"You have defied me; that is enough," he said, with a gloomy and resolute air. "But it is passion only that speaks in you. You will return to reason and be sorry for what you have said."

"Never, sir, never!" she cried, passionately. "You have put yourself beyond the pale of my consideration by your base effort. I have no further answer to give you, now nor hereafter. This interview has lasted long enough. I cannot and will not bear it longer."

She turned and swept through the door like an offended queen, without another look at the man, who stood there pale and discomfited, biting his lips in impotent anger.

CHAPTER XIII.

NO ANSWER.

An old, well-dressed and fine-faced gentleman called at Mr. Leonard's store, and stood looking irresolutely down the long floor, as if in doubt whom to address. A salesman approached, supposing him to be a customer.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"I came to inquire about a boy you have engaged here. I believe you have a boy?"

"Yes, sir. I hope there is nothing wrong about him. Has he been in mischief?"

"No, no. Just the contrary. Is he in?"

"Somewhere. He will be here in a minute."

"What kind of a boy is he, sir? You ask if he has been in mischief. Is he inclined that way?"

"I rather think he is," said the salesman, smiling.

"He is the queerest specimen I ever came across.

I would as soon try to tame a wild-cat as to keep Will out of mischief. There he is, now. I will send him to you."

Will came readily at the call of the salesman, who directed him to his visitor.

"Want to see me?" asked Will, demurely, looking curiously at the old man.

"Yes, my lad," was the reply. "You ran away so quickly the other day that I had no time to thank you for your kindness."

"I twig you now," said Will, vigorously. "You're the old chap I picked up from under the car-wheels. Glad to see you ag'in, but dunno how the thunder you found me."

"I was not going to lose sight of you. I had a boy to follow you."

"You had hey? Well, that's fun. Wish I'd seen that boy."

"What for?"

"Jist to play Hail Columbia on his hide, that's all. Don't 'low no feller to be spottin' me through the streets. Bet he wouldn't eat no supper that night if I'd cottedched him."

"You are a queer boy. But I am bound to reward you for your kindness. You must come to my house. I want to have a talk with you."

"Ain't got no notion of being talked to death," said Will. "Let's have it here."

"No," said the old gentleman, decidedly. "I can't interfere with Mr. Leonard's business. Here is my card. I hope you will call on me this evening."

"Don't bother yourself 'bout business. Reckon I'm my own boss here. You won't stay? Well, I'll toddle round your way, then. Curious to hear what you've got to say."

"What is your name, my lad?"

"Willful Will is what folks generally call me. I spose that's name enough. What's yours?"

"My name is John Somers."

"Hanged if the old chap ain't got the same name as I have," said Will to himself. "I best keep shady. He'll be wanting to let on to be a relation, and I ain't taking on any new relations just now."

"Well, I'll swim round your way some time afore long," he said, aloud. "Live out Arch street, hey? That's grandeur."

"I am wealthy, my lad, and alone in the world. I try to do some little good with my money. I owe you a debt of gratitude which I wish to repay."

"All right. I'm your hoss," said Will, energetically. "Don't want no gratitude, and nothin' else I don't earn with my fingers and toes. But I'll get round just to see how you live."

After so'e few words more Will's visitor departed, leaving that young gentleman in a whirl of suppressed amusement.

"Well, I'll be fiddled," he said, vigorously slapping his knee, "if this ain't the richest go yet. The old cove's cracked, that's sure. Did he calkilate I was going to leave him laying under the car-wheels? Strikes me there's some sell behind all this. Folks don't put themselves to sich trouble for nothing. He's an old rogue and wants to get something out of me, I'll bet a cow. He's heered my name and wants to let on to be a relation. Shouldn't wonder if the old chap was a burglar. I've seed just such things played at the theater. Anyhow I'll go see him and pump him dry. I'll let him see that Willful Will ain't to be bought with nobody's tin tips."

Will went reflectively back to his work.

At the same hour that Will was holding this interview with the grateful old gentleman, John Elkton was holding an interview of another character with his betrothed.

He had received a brief note from her that morning, vaguely detailing the suspicions in regard to her silken bow, and asking him to meet her.

The letter had produced a strong effect on his mind. He read it again and again, the mystery remaining unexplained to him. He could only understand that he had been accused of some crime.

"What does it mean, Jennie?" he asked. "Your note is as mysterious as a Sphynx. Have I murdered somebody and forgotten it?"

"It is in relation to this," she replied, holding out the perilous bow. "It is claimed that this silk was stolen, and they suspect you of being implicated."

"Who claims so? Who suspects me?" he cried, hotly.

"Mr. Leonard declares most positively that it is a piece of some silk that has just been stolen from him."

"What hinders there being plenty such silk in the city?"

"There is not. It is a new pattern, just imported by him, and stolen from the custom-house by false papers."

"This is a strange story you tell me, Jennie," he said, leaning his head reflectively on his hand.

"You told Mr. Leonard that I gave you the silk?"

"I did not!" she broke out, impulsively. "I refused to tell him. I suffered torments when I heard this terrible story, heard doubts cast on you. I acted strangely; refused bitterly to answer him. I do not know what he thought. He did not seem to suspect you."

"Who did, then?" asked her lover, looking intently into her eyes.

"It was his confidential clerk, Mr. Augustus Wilson. I have had a distressing interview with him. He accuses you openly of theft, and says that he has convincing proofs against you."

"He lies, then," cried John, indignantly. "I defy him to his proofs. Did he tell you what they were?"

"No. He promised to conceal or destroy them, if I wished."

"Promised! It was only a promise?"

"A promise with a proviso. I was, if I would save

you, to break our engagement, to accept his love, to promise to be his wife."

"Well, that's cool!" said John, with a long breath.

"I'm to be thrown overboard it seems. And of course you felt great pity and consideration for me, and wanted to save me, and saw no way to do it but by accepting this desirable offer."

His tones were full of bitterness.

She laid her hand on his lips with a touch that was almost a blow. Indignation flamed into her face.

"You are not serious in that question?" she cried. "You cannot think so meanly of me! Accept him! I rejected him with the scorn his base offer deserved. I told him Jennie Arlington was not for sale, however high the price offered."

"That's my own Jennie," he replied, kissing her burning lips. "I knew how you would answer such a suit."

"Yet I did it with a horrible fear at my heart—a fear that he had the proofs, that he would have you arrested for theft."

"Do I understand that you thought me capable of such a crime?"

He drew back from her with a dark look gathering upon his face.

"No, no! I knew you were innocent, but I knew how suspicious circumstances will sometimes condemn an innocent man. Valuable silks have been stolen from Mr. Leonard. You have some of them in your possession. You will be required to explain how you obtained them, and to save yourself by revealing the real culprit."

He threw himself in his chair, and leaned his head heavily upon his hands. Marks of painful reflection passed over his face. She looked eagerly but doubtfully into his speaking countenance.

"Tell me, John," she said, "where did you get the silk? Who gave it to you, or how did you obtain it? I know you can easily explain this, easily clear yourself from this unpleasant suspicion."

He remained silent a minute longer, before answering her question. The eagerness in her face changed to a look of pain greater than his.

"I cannot, Jennie," he replied. "It is a secret which I cannot reveal."

She passed over to him and took his hand in hers, looking eagerly into his downcast eyes.

"Not even to me, John?" she asked.

"Not even to you, Jennie," he replied.

She took her seat again, a look of deep distress upon her face. Was this love? This the confidence with which love should be crowned?

"My secrets are yours," he said, catching at the meaning of her action. "This is not my secret, and I am not at liberty to reveal it."

"And am I to understand, John Elkton," she broke out, "that you are the recipient of a disgraceful secret? that you are concerned with criminals? that you have made me a receiver of stolen goods? I repelled the insinuation with scorn when made by another. I did not expect to have it confirmed by yourself."

"Now, Jennie, you are hot and hasty again," he said, rising and passing his hand over her flushed brow. "You will force me to say what I had rather not. I received the silk innocently. That is all I can say at present. I hope soon to be able to tell you all."

"You tell me much in that," she said, with a smile of relief. "You do not know how sick at heart I felt when I thought you were accusing yourself. I believe you firmly, John. But suppose they accuse you? Such an answer will not serve."

"They will get no other. Not yet, at least."

But we must close this conversation, as it ceases here to interest us. Shortly after John saw her to the car, on her way home.

"Don't fear that I will be in haste to accept Mr. Wilson's offer," she said, as they parted. "I have given my heart in another quarter, and I never take back gifts."

A warm pressure of her hand, a look of infinite gratitude in his eyes, was his only answer.

He had still another interview that afternoon. It was after Jennie was well on her way home, and he had returned to his office duties, that his name was called in the store, and he was informed that a gentleman had asked to see him.

He went out. The person who advanced to meet him was a stranger; a slender, sharp-eyed man.

"Mr. Elkton?" he asked, with a keen look at John's face.

"That is my name," was the reply.

"I wish a few words with you," he said, leading out of hearing of the salesman.

"I shall be happy to oblige you in any way," said John, "but excuse me for hoping that you will be brief, as I am quite busy."

"I will not detain you long," said the other, "but will to my business at once. You know a lady named Miss Arlington?"

"Yes," replied John, wondering.

"You lately presented her with a small piece of silk, of a peculiar pattern?"

"Well, sir, to what do these questions tend?" asked John, reddening.

"Only that I would be glad to have you inform me where you got that silk."

"Suppose I decline to inform you?"

"I hope you will not," replied the other, coolly, "as in that case I shall be obliged to put you to personal inconvenience."

"Who are you?" asked John.

"My name is Flitter," replied the other. "I am a detective officer. I have to inform you that the silk in question was stolen. I hope and believe that you can satisfactorily explain your possession of it. But I shall require you to do so."

"I can, but not at present."

"It must be done at present."

"Must is a strong term, Mr. Fitler. I decline to be governed by it."

"Which means that you will not explain. Or else that you cannot. Your refusal gives me a disagreeable duty, Mr. Elkton."

"Which is?" replied John, coolly.

"To arrest you, on a criminal charge," said Mr. Fitler, laying his hand heavily on John's shoulder.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL'S REVELATION.

It was Jennie Arlington's first trouble, and it was a deep one. She was proud, in her way; that rare pride which shrinks from disgrace as from a pestle, yet is conjoined with a sterling honesty that clings to the right, even through disgrace.

She had suffered deeply, from the moment of discovery that her lover was, in some strange way, open to suspicion. Her weak effort to conceal the truth from her guardian had been followed by Mr. Wilson's accusation of her lover, and his insulting suit.

Following this was John Elkton's own strange manner, and his positive refusal to explain his possession of the silk.

The mystery deepened and darkened with every new development, and the poor girl's heart throbbed with painful suspense as she thought over the many sad possibilities that lay in the future.

Yet with it all she lost no faith in her lover's truth and honesty. She had come from their last meeting convinced of his innocence, though aware that he was in some way involved in suspicion, and trembling lest he should find less favorable interpreters of his silence than herself.

Her life, so far, had been sunny, and this sudden descent into the shadow of a great cloud was doubly hard to bear. But there was in her nature powers which had never yet been developed, and which rose within her to meet this crisis in her life. That nature is only half developed on which the hand of sorrow has never been laid.

She sat brooding in the library, looking out over the bright June flowers in the garden, yet seeing only shadow there, when her reverie was broken by a servant announcing a visitor.

She turned to see the handsome face and sturdy form of Will Somers. He advanced into the room with his usual air of self-possession, his cap still on his head, and a flavor of the street Arab still about him, despite his good clothes and the lessons in politeness he had received.

Will was not to be easily cured of the effects of his early training.

"Come out to see you on some bizness for Mr. Leonard," he said, taking a seat nonchalantly, "but ain't in no hurry, and guess I'll stay awhile and have a chat."

"How do you think Mr. Leonard will like your chatting when he may want you back in haste?" she asked.

"It takes two to make a bargain," he replied, carelessly. "He's one, and I'm t'other. If he sees me back in the store afore I feel like getting there, I hope it'll do his eyesight good."

"You have found him a kindly employer, Will. You would not impose on him?" she asked, deprecatingly.

"I've got nothing ag'in him," said Will. "He's behaved himself pretty well since I've been there. If he has s out the same I won't shake him. I'm not a bit afraid of work, gal. Don't take that notion into your head. He's got nothing to find fault with."

"Well what can I do for you to-day?" she said, rising, as if to give him a hint that it was best for him to go.

"Now set down ag'in, Jennie," said Will, with an easy wave of his hand. "Don't be getting worried about me. I'm all right. Intend to stick by Mr. Leonard as long as he keeps up to the square, so don't think I'll be giving him his walking-papers. Set down. I want to talk to you."

"Make it brief, then," she said, reluctantly seating herself.

"How about the chap you told me about when I was here afore? Sticking to him yet? I told you to shake him you know, and guess it's the best you can do."

"Is that all you have to say?" she asked, impatiently.

"I'm goin' for you myself, you know," said Will, unabashed. "Jist want you to wait till I'm grown up. Drop that chap like a hot potato. He ain't half gool-lokin' enough or good enough for you."

"You appear to know a great deal about him," she said, amused.

"Think I seen him the day I met you in town. Jist you shake him, that's my advice. Look at me, a handsome, well-built feller, and turned of sixteen. I'll be in the market after a while, and the gal that gets me is a lucky one."

"I will bear you in mind, if I run short of a lover," she replied, with a smile. "I will let you know when I dismiss the present one."

"What's the chap's name, anyhow?" asked Will, twisting round on his chair.

"Suppose I don't choose to tell his rival?"

"Ain't ashamed of him, are you?"

"Not at all. His name is John Elkton."

"Who's that?" cried Will, suddenly, starting as if something had struck him.

"Wn, Will," she replied, in wonder, "what ails you?"

"John Elkton, you said?"

"Certainly."

"He's a salesman at White & Bradley's ain't he?"

"Yes," she replied, with a nervous twitch of the fingers.

"Guess he's out of the market, and the coast's

clear for this young man," said Will, settling himself back easily in his chair.

"I don't understand you. Explain yourself," she said, rising and laying her hand impulsively on his shoulder, while a slight pallor came upon her face.

"Thought everybody knewed it," said Will, easily. "That chap's in quod."

"In what?" she asked.

"He's down below, I say. In the stone jug."

"You say great deal," she said, shaking him in her impatience. "I wish you would say something that could be understood."

"Tain't my fault if folks don't understand good English," said Will. "He's locked up in jail. Down in Moya. Took up for smuggling out of the custom house."

Sick at heart on hearing this sudden confirmation of her worst fears, Jennie staggered back to her chair, seating herself heavily, as if a great weight had been laid upon her shoulders.

Will looked on in unwonted surprise, a faint suspicion struggling through his brain that he had gone too far. The mysteries of the female heart were an unsolved problem to him, and he had not dreamed that he might be touching exposed nerves with his rude remarks. A revulsion came upon him as he saw her sink back pale and helpless, in her chair.

"Why, Jennie," he cried, with a show of emotion, "hope I haven't hurt your feelin's? Didn't calculate that you keered that much for the man. Don't be so worried. Guess he'll come out all right."

"Is it really so?" she asked, in a low, frightened tone. "Is he really in prison?"

"Yes," said Will. "But he won't stay there, so don't you worry. We'll get him out. I'll go bail for him myself."

She smiled sadly at Will's idea of going bail.

"Now hold your head up, Jennie," said Will, putting his arm round her with a movement of boyish sympathy. "It's a pity I hadn't better sense; a feller that's been around like me. But I've been kicked up among boys. Dunno much about gals."

"There, Will, I do not blame you," she said, rising with a proud gesture, as if she had thrown off all weakness. "He's innocent. I know that. It is not possible that innocence can suffer the penalty of guilt."

"I know he is, and I'll clear him. Just leave it to me."

"Why, how will you do that?" she doubtfully asked.

"Think I've got my eye on the chap that's been goin' through Mr. Leonard. Got the trap set, but it ain't sprung yet. Think I'll catch an old fox in a tight trap."

"Is that so, Will?" Miss Arlington eagerly asked. "Whom do you suspect?"

"Never mind now," was Will's mysterious answer. "There's more than one in it. Been spotting them for some time. Bet I bring them up with a half-hitch."

"Does Mr. Leonard know of your suspicions?"

"Not he. Nor nobody else 'cept Willful Will. That's not the way I carry on bizness. When I take a job in hand I don't want no pards. I know they've got a notion that I'm mixed in it myself, and I know who set up that job. If I don't prove him a liar, it's queer."

"You will? They don't suspect you of being leagued with the robbers?"

"Think they do, but they've got the wrong cow by the horns. Don't you worry about John Elkton. There won't no harm come to him. Didn't know you was so tied up in him, or I wouldn't joke about him the way I did."

"Why, Will, you weren't making love in earnest then?" she said, with a look of concern.

"Now you know I wasn't, Jennie; so don't be poking fun at me. When I make love in earnest I'll go a different way about it."

"I would like to be by."

"Hope you won't, for I ain't in love with you. Like you though, Jennie, first-rate. There's something keeps pullin' me to you. Guess it's cause you look like me. Anyhow, I'm goin' to take John Elkton out of jail, or it'll be queer."

"I hope you may be able," she said, seriously. Will's confident manner gave her hope despite her better judgment.

"I never said a thing I didn't do, and I won't go back on this," said Will, with an earnest and assured air that gave her new hope.

The boy was energetic, honest and shrewd, and his early life might have given him much experience of the criminal classes. He might then not be talking without warrant, and she felt herself leaning with great faith upon his promise.

"Guess I'd better be going now," said Will. "My time's about up."

In ten minutes more, his errand completed, he was on his way back to the store.

"Mighty nice gal. Ain't many like her," he said to himself. "I'm just the feller to do what I can for her. Hope John Elkton ain't mixed with the gang. Don't think he is. Seen him the other day, and he's got an honest man's face. That goes' for a good deal these days."

CHAPTER XV.

WILL VISITS MR. SOMERS.

"I would have preferred to have kept this matter quiet," said Mr. Fitler, the officer. "But that can't be done now. The robbery of the cloths is public property; and the arrest of John Elkton has made the affair of the silks as public."

"And he still refuses to tell where he got the piece which he gave my ward?" asked Mr. Leonard, anxiously.

"Yes. We cannot get a word from him about it."

"That has a very suspicious look," said Mr. Wilson. "The man could have no object in screening robbers unless he hopes to save himself by it."

"He won't save himself," said the officer, sharply. "It looks more like the old principle of honor among thieves."

"And you have no other trace?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"Nothing as yet. The rogues have covered up their track well."

"You still think it is some one in the store?" asked Wilson.

"The work could not have been done without an accomplice here. Have you gained any new ideas about it?"

"I am still more doubtful about that boy," said Wilson. "There has been a suspicious-looking old man here to see him."

"Ah!" said Mr. Fitler, interested. "Was he known, or was any effort made to follow him?"

"No. I was not here."

"If he comes again he must be spotted. I don't believe that boy is implicated, but we cannot afford to trust anybody."

"Why not follow the boy then?" suggested Mr. Leonard. "His places of resort and associates should be known."

"A good idea," replied the officer. "I will put it in practice."

"You had best arrest and examine him," said Mr. Wilson. "The truth may be frightened out of him."

"Frighten him!" cried the officer. "Frighten that boy? I see you don't know him yet. Our only hope is to take him unawares. All the magistrates in the land could not make him tell what he was not disposed to."

"I think you are right," said Mr. Leonard. "He may be coaxed. There is no driving him."

"Has anything fresh turned up?" asked the officer. "Any new raid on your dry-goods?"

"Nothing. We have had no new stuffs in lately. I expect to have some in next week and will see that they are watched."

"You may save yourself the trouble. They won't be touched," said the officer, decisively.

"How about the investigation of your books?" asked Mr. Fitler. "Did you trace any loss?"

"Yes. There has evidently been robberies committed before. Three or four at least. Perhaps dozen."

"Ah! That is important. Running how long?"

"Over a year."

"That changes the aspect of things. Have all your employees been with you that long?"

"All except Will."

"That fact seems to clear Will. There will be no harm in watching him, though. I suppose you have received hundreds of invoices in that time?"

"Yes."

"Then the robbers are choice in their operations. They don't make a raid on every invoice. I judge from that lot you expect now would not be disturbed, even if there had been no discovery."

"I quite agree with you there," said Mr. Wilson. "They will wait till our vigilance is relaxed."

Mr. Fitler leaned back in his chair, looking closely at Wilson as he spoke.

This intent observation of persons was a habit of his. It seemed to be called forth now by Mr. Wilson's decided settling of how the thieves would act. His tone had been very positive.

"I guess it is very likely you are right," said the officer, carelessly.

They were interrupted by the opening of the door, and the abrupt entrance of Will into the room.

He laid a small package on the table.

"Mr. Thompson says that's all correct," he said, nodding familiarly to the officer.

"Very well," answered Mr. Leonard.

"He wants to know, what's more, what stuff you feed your messengers on, that makes them so slippery of the tongue."

"You have been giving him some impudence, Will," said Mr. Leonard.

"Not a bit. I never give impudence," said Will, indignantly. "I just wakened some of them up a trifle. He was loafing over other things, you see, and keeping me waiting. Now that weren't my idea of bizness, and I didn't stop long to say so."

"What did you say to them?" asked Wilson.

"I told them that if they thought I was goin' to hang round cooling my shins waitin' on them, they'd spent their money for the wrong monkey, that was all. But I didn't give no impudence."

"You came very near it, then," said Wilson.

"Bizness is about done up for to-night, and I've got some of my own to tend to. Anything ag'in' my gettin' off early?" asked Will.

"No. You can go," said Mr. Leonard.

"That's clever. Want to call on my uncle," replied Will, with an odd look, as he left the room.

"There is some hidden meaning in that last remark," said the officer, rising. "Very likely he may be going to call on the old man you speak of. I think I will track him and learn who this individual is."

Will was not twenty steps from the door before the eyes of the shrewd officer were on him. Unconscious of espionage he hurried in a rapid manner through the streets, giving Mr. Fitler some trouble to keep him in sight.

He stopped at length on the doorstep of one of the fine old houses on Arch street, and boldly rung the bell.

"Wonder what the deuce he wants there!" muttered the officer. "It is a queer place for a young

reprobate like him to be visiting. Not much like the house of a burglar, that's sure.

It was more than an hour before Will reappeared. He went now straight to his home in a very different quarter of the city, leaving the officer full of wonder that a boy like Will could have business detaining him so long in an Arch street residence.

Will had found the grateful old gentleman at home, and had had a long chat with him.

There was much evidence of wealth in Mr. Somers' surroundings, and the room in which he was interviewed by Will was richly furnished, and tastefully adorned with oil paintings and other objects of art.

He questioned Will very closely as to his former life, his present residence and mode of living, his advantages of education, etc.

His young visitor, however, was not very communicative.

"Never went to school much," said Will, frankly, when this point was touched on. "Bout two days and a half, I think."

"How was that, my lad?" said the old gentleman, with a serious knitting of the brows.

"I dunno," said Will, carelessly. "Spect it was 'cause the door wasn't strong enough."

"Why, what could that have to do with it?" was the surprised rejoinder.

"It was all the master's doin's," said Will, with an air of injured innocence. "He put me down before a lot of twisted curlykews that he called the alphabet. There was too many of them, that was the whole trouble. Couldn't keep them all in my head at once. Fast as I got one nailed in another slipped out."

"You only needed study to learn," said Mr. Somers.

"Maybe so, but the master wasn't reasonable, and him and me couldn't agree. 'What's that?' he says, pointing to one of them. I scratched my head, but I couldn't fetch her. 'That's P,' he said, kind of riled. 'S'pose it is? What's the odds?' said I, just as quic'." You're a numbskull," he says. "You're a rinoceros," I says. That was all the conversation. The feller went for me, and there was a bit of rough and tumble that'd done your heart good. He hurt me some, and I hurt him wuss. One of the boys tried to lock the door to keep me in, but it don't work. I busted the old lock and went out sailing. Ain't been to school since, and you can't make me believe now that that letter was P."

"That was a rich school experience," said Mr. Somers, laughing.

"Bee pickin' up my schoolin' on the street ever since," said Will. "It's a rough one, but I've learnt something. Ain't worth a cent at books, but I'm good at men."

"Which is a very important branch of education," said Mr. Somers. "Your father and mother are not living then?"

"Never had none that I know on."

"That is bad, very bad," said Mr. Somers, feelingly. "No wonder that a poor little orphan like you has had a rough life. It is well that you have come through life with an honest record, after being exposed to such temptations."

"I never carried away anything I hadn't earned," said Will, "and never hit a boy that wasn't as big or bigger than me. And never took no slack from anybody, if he was as big as a meeting-house and dressed like a king."

"Brave, independent and honest," said the old gentleman, "you are the making of a true American citizen. I only hope my poor boy may have as good a record."

"Your boy?" said Will, questioningly.

"Yes, my lad," said Mr. Somers, with a pained expression. "I had two dear children, a boy and a girl, who are lost to me. I do not know if they even live. Perhaps it is better if they do not."

"That's a bad bizness," said Will, looking the sympathy he so poorly expressed.

"They were stolen from me by an enemy, an old vagrant who had a fancied injury to revenge. I have sought them in vain ever since. I fear I shall never find them."

"And the old vagabond?"

"He is dead. His secret perished with him."

"Well, that's bad. Don't wonder you're down-hearted. Hope you'll run across them yet, but it's risky. Guess I'll have to go now."

"Sit still a minute," said the old man, decisively. "I wish to have some further conversation with you. I owe you a debt which is not yet repaid."

"Oh, drop that!" cried Will, impatiently. "I have taken a fancy to you aside from that. You are living in squalor and ignorance. I am wealthy and alone. What hinders me from taking you into my house, and giving you the advantages of which fortune has deprived you? I know you will amply repay my care."

"There's one thing hinders," said Will, dryly.

"I see no hindrance. What is it?"

"It's only that I ain't in the notion of being took in and done for. I've hooded my own row so far, and guess I'll keep it up."

"But this is an idle scruple. You would feel no dependence here."

"I'd feel it in my own muscles and in my own nerves," said Will, decisively. "I wouldn't marry no gal that was richer than me, and I ain't going to adopt a rich stepfather. I went into Mr. Leonard's store with a notion to learn bizness, and I'm not the feller to stand at the bottom of the ladder. If I haven't made my pile before ten years I'll sell out. Much obliged to you all the same, but can't see it in your light."

Mr. Somers did his best to overcome this scruple, but Will was not to be shaken. He would not eat the bread of dependence.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD COMPANIONS.

It was noon on Monday. Will spent his dinner-hour in Independence Square, a spot sacred to his old associates of boot-blacking propensities.

He had given up eating for the pleasure of interviewing. He had already had an earnest talk with some half a dozen of the boys, and now approached another, who was just entering the Square from Walnut street.

The latter was a boy of Will's own age, a barefooted, bare-armed, ragged young citizen, with a keen, wide-awake look on his not overly-clean face.

"Hallo, Joe!" cried Will.

"Well, I'll be swagged if it ain't Willful Will!" cried Joe, taking Will's offered hand.

"How goes it, old crony?" said Will.

"Old-fashioned. You've been on the coast and know the ropes. Well, if you ain't got up gallus! New shoes, and paper-collar, and a ribbon on his hat! Must have dropped into a fortune."

"I am in a store, Joe. We must dress, you know, in better toggery than you want here."

"In a store, hey? Know'd you'd come to something. Does it pay, Will? Ain't it dreadful wear-ing? Seems to me I'd seem like a sparrow in a cage."

"I did at first," said Will, drawing his friend to a seat. "You soon get broke in, though. I like it better than the street now."

"And you've got to say, 'sir' to folks, and take off your hat, and have counter-jumpers order you around like a dog. Dunno how you stand it. You licked me once for trying to put it on you."

"I don't stand it any better, now," said Will. "They can't come none of their jokes on me. One feller tried it and I cured him. They've been mighty polite ever since."

"Is that so?" said Joe, looking at Will as at one who has made a successful voyage of discovery. "Shoot me if I ain't got a notion of trying it. I'm getting too big for this job. How did you get a place?"

"I asked for it, and wouldn't take no for an answer. I just captured it."

"You're the chap for that," said Joe, admiringly. "Wish you'd work me in somewhere. You must be getting to know folks."

"I'll work for you," answered Will. "It's about time you was giving up this trade. You're well posted about town yourself, Joe."

"Not among bizness folks. Know a good deal about down-towners. Ain't many cribs I haven't been in or smelt out."

"I used to know the shady places all over town."

"So do I," said Joe, with an eager display of knowledge. "I've been there. Could lay my hand on half the burglars in town, and all the fences."

"But I could name some what would stump you."

"Bet you couldn't," said Joe.

"I'll go ten cents I can."

"I'll cover it," said Joe, producing a piece of soiled currency of that value. "But you ain't to go on all day. Won't give you but three chances."

"That's square," said Will. "Let's see now. Where's Ned Hogan's Retreat?"

"Shippen, below Second, and one chance sold cheap," said Joe, triumphantly.

"Where's Tim the Tinker's crib? Think I've got you there."

"Not by a jug full," cried Joe, with an eager laugh. "It's on Beach street, above Brown. Guess I'll rake down them tens."

"You're pretty well posted, Joe," said Will, with a reflective pause. "Calculate to throw you on the next, though."

"Tain't in the wood," said Joe, confidently.

"It's a namesake of yours. You ought to know your own relations. Where's Black-eyed Joe's Mill?"

Will gazed at him triumphantly, as Joe sat scratching his head, with an air of reflection.

"That's my cash," he said.

"Hold up," said Joe. "Give a feller time to think. I don't know him by that name. But I've got a notion I could nail him. Ain't goin' to give up the bet till it's settled."

"Who's the man you're thinking of?"

"It's Joe Prime, that keeps the confidential house in a little street off South street. He's got eyes as black as coal, and I once heard his place called the mill. You're sold, Will. Pass over them tens."

"He's a fence, then, and keeps a stock of burglar's goods in store?"

"That's him," said Joe. "I follerred some light-fingered nobs there once, and nailed him. Pass over."

"The bet ain't settled yet," said Will. "Where is this alley?"

Joe gave a more precise description of its location.

"I've a notion you've nailed it, Joe," said Will.

"Meet me on the corner of the alley to-night before eight, and we'll settle."

"What the blue blazes is that for?" asked Joe, suspiciously.

"Are you trying to sell on me? If you are, I'm blowed if I can't polish you."

"You never seen the day you could do that, Joe. And nobody knows it better than you. Can't say now if there's anything in the wind or no. Jist meet me there, that's all."

"I never tramp on a blind scout."

"I want you. Ain't that enough?" said Will, impatiently. "You're as curious as an old woman. Say half-past seven, sharp, at the corner. I'll tell you then if you've won your bet or not. Can't tell now."

"You're goin' into perfice bizness, Will."

"Did you ever steal?" asked Will.

"Never a pin's worth."

"Then it's the best bizness you can go in. You've begun honest, and you'd best keep honest. But you beat thunder at smelling out thieves. Don't you miss being there?"

Joe sunk into a deep cogitation after Will had left him. He was considering the unsought tribute to his powers which had just been given him, and wondering in his own mind if he was not cut out by nature for a detective.

Will spent the afternoon quietly in the store, ate a hasty and frugal supper, and reached the rendezvous at the hour named.

Joe was already there, lounging easily upon a curbstone in South street. He gazed wonderingly at Will.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said, "if the feller ain't dropped his store toggery and come out in his old rig. I can smell a rat now, and a big one."

Will was hardly recognizable in the dilapidated suit he wore, and in the highly ventilated hat, which he pulled down like a mask over his eyes.

"If things work well you'll get something to cover this," said Will, as he handed Joe the amount of the bet. "Seen anybody go up the alley?"

"No, only been here five minutes."

"Let's look in then. Show me the house."

The two boys strolled carelessly into the narrow street. It was just wide enough to let a wagon through comfortably, and ended abruptly at a similar street running at right angles to it. The locality was not redolent of sweet smells.

It was bordered by houses on each side, of fair size for the location, but in very bad condition. The street swarmed with children.

On the corner of the second small street stood a house of more pretensions. It was a three-storyed brick, of wide front. The main room, on the corner, was used as a bar-room, bearing an unpretentious sign of "Imported Wines and Liquors." The name of the landlord, "Joe Prime," accompanied this very dubious announcement.

The place seemed well patronized, and the noise within gave evidence of the exciting qualities of Joe Prime's liquors, if it said little for their purity.

"That's not the place," said Will, decisively; "might as well make a fence-shop of the custom-house."

"There are other ways in," said Joe, leading round the corner.

Will now saw that the house extended a considerable distance back, with a yard fence along this second street. A gate in this fence stood very slightly ajar.

"That's the back doorway," said Joe.

"I want a squint at the landlord now," said Will, pushing into the bar-room, through the throng of loungers.

Behind the bar was a flashily-dressed young fellow, with as much evil in his face as it would conveniently hold, busily dealing out liquid poison to his customers.

The latter were a motley set, in all stages of intoxication. The scene was no new one to Will, however, and his sensibilities were not easily shocked.

As he stood, looking sharply through the throng of customers, a door behind the bar opened, and a man in his shirt-sleeves entered. A glance told Will that this was the person who had been described to him, and satisfied him that it was the man he wanted.

He was small, but stoutly built, swarthy almost as an Indian, with straight black hair, and eyes of deep blackness. He cast a surly glance over the room, speaking to some of the drunken wretches about the bar in an amiable tones.

Will slipped quietly out of the room.

"That's Black-eyed Joe," he said, on meeting his friend outside.

"What comes next, then?"

"I spect some folks here at eight o'clock. They'll be like to take the gate for it, but might try the front door."

"Yes. What then?"

"You and me are to see them, and fix their photographs in our heads. You take your stand here, where you've got a set at the front door. You're posted in thieves and sich, and don't let any go in without your nailin' them. I'll take my squint at the gate. I think it's like my fellers will take that route."

Will's way of taking the gate was to coil himself in a heap against the opposite fence, and to be apparently lost in slumber.

He slept, however, with both eyes wide open.

He had not been there five minutes before a man came quietly up the alley, looking suspiciously around. He saw Will, but paid no attention to him. In an instant he had opened the gate and disappeared in the yard.

Ten minutes passed of Will's silent watch, when two men came along in company. They were eagerly debating the merits of some prize-fighter.

He expected they would pass by, but they boldly opened the gate and passed in, closing it behind them.

Several more men came up the alley, but passed on without stopping.

A half-hour of Will's silent watch had passed, and he was about to give it up, under the impression that all his birds were caged, when a fourth man came along.

Will watched to see if he, too, would pass by. He came on with a hesitating step, his hat drawn down low over his eyes, and his hand stroking his whisker in such a way that half his face was hidden.

The boy lay quiet as death, not a muscle moving.

The new-comer paused a moment opposite the gate, glancing furtively around. Then with a quick stealthy movement he opened the gate and slipped in.

"Bet a goose I know you," said Will to himself, as he rose to his feet. "Won't there be ructions when I let the cat out of the bag! Guess the 'coons are all treed now. What's the news, Joe?"

"Nothing," said the latter, who had approached on seeing Will rise. "They're all lambs my side of the house. What's your luck?"

"Four foxes," said Will, pointing to the gate. "There's their hole," he continued.

He indicated a window in the second story, in which a light had just appeared. A curtain inside came down to within an inch of the bottom.

"Want to follow it up?" asked Joe.

"If it's in the wood."

"Let's shin it up that shed, then. We can climb like squirrels. It's risky, but if there's anything in it we ain't afraid of risk."

"I'm your hoss," was Will's sententious answer. There was no one in the street just then. The shed came down nearly to the fence. Climbing to Will's shoulders, Joe was in an instant on top the fence. In a second more he was stretched flat on the low shed.

This evolution was not so easy for Will. He had nobody's shoulders to climb from. After looking round irresolutely for a moment, a bold thought came into his head.

He opened the gate a crack and glanced into the yard. It was empty.

Not a second lost Will. A barrel stood beside the fence. One quick leap and he was on top. A light quivering motion and he was flat on the shed.

Joe had meanwhile crept to the window and was looking in.

"What luck?" whispered Will, as his companion dropped his head.

"Bully!" replied Joe, in a like tone. "The whole four are in, and Joe Prime with them. Jist worm up this way, and take a squint."

CHAPTER XVII.

GUARDIAN AND WARD.

JENNIE ARLINGTON'S sorrow had worn off, and had been replaced by a sentiment of anger and bitterness of spirit. That a man like John Elkton should be seized as a common felon, a man of the purest character and unstained reputation to be thrown into prison on a bare suspicion, seemed an utter outrage. She was in no mood to appreciate the reasons for this arrest, or to consider the very dubious position in which his refusal to explain placed him. She was looking at his character with eyes of love, and it vexed her that the world was blind to what seemed so evident to her. She was angry with her guardian, with the officer, with Mr. Wilson, with every party concerned. Even the unoffending bow shared in this resentment. She would have taken it from her dressing-table and trampled it under foot, but on looking for it it was gone.

This discovery increased her resentment. Mr. Leonard, then, had entered her room, possessed himself of her lover's last gift to her, and intended to use it with the hope of convicting him of robbery.

She had been pale and drooping these last few days. He had desisted from asking the cause. He knew it too well, and shrank from an encounter with grief which he could not relieve.

To-day she was red and blooming, and he ventured to compliment her on the favorable change.

"I am glad to see your color coming back again, Jennie," he said. "You begin to look like your old self again. I could not bear to see you so cast down as you have been for some days past."

"I do not think it could have troubled your mind very deeply," she replied, in a bitter tone.

"Why do you say that, Jennie?" was his surprised rejoinder. "You know that no father could feel more tenderly toward you than I do."

"I know that no stranger could have done me a deeper wrong than you have done," she replied, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Such language seems to me utterly uncalled for," he answered, with a deeply-pained look.

"Why have you thrown John Elkton into prison?" was her unflinching reply.

"It could not be avoided, Jennie. You should know that. He is found with a piece of stolen goods in his possession. He refuses to tell where he obtained it. The law holds such a man guilty, and so does common sense. I am very sorry to have wounded you, but could not act otherwise. If he is innocent, why is he silent?"

"You know he is innocent," she hotly replied. "There is nothing you know better. He is incapable of such an action, and you know it. If I alone knew him, and he was a stranger to you, it would be different. You have known him as long as I have, and as well. You know he is innocent."

"You are young," he calmly answered. "You have not studied human nature deeply. Implicit trust is not to be placed in any man."

"That is the argument of a policeman," she replied, "one who only sees the evil side of men."

"It is the argument of experience," he rejoined. "All young people tend to trust in human nature. Most old people have their eyes so opened by fraud and deceit that they incline to doubt all unproved characters."

"Do you mean to say that John Elkton's character is unproved?" she asked, with a quick glance.

"I was not making any application of my words," he quickly replied. "He is a man, with human weaknesses. What do we know of his life, outside of his visits here? We do not know how or where he spends his time, nor who are his associates. He does not see you very frequently."

"You will hint next that he is deceiving me," was her hot answer. "He visits me as often as he can, and I have perfect faith in his love and his honesty."

I do not need to have him always under my eyes to know and trust him. That would be a sorry rule."

"It might often prove a good one," he answered.

"You know it is not in his case. You know it is not, sir," she cried, rising impatiently and pacing the floor. "You have deeply pained and mortified me, Mr. Leonard. But if you should throw him into a convict's cell you could not break my love and faith. I am proud, and can feel keenly the disgrace in which you have plunged me. But I would not desert him were it tenfold deeper. You know John Elkton, and you dare not say that you believe him guilty. You do not believe it."

"I cannot help Doubting him, Jennie," he replied.

"Doubt him!" she cried. "And is a mere doubt warrant enough for you to take such action, to injure and disgrace him, to wound me so deeply? You doubt him! If you had seen your goods in his possession it would not have given you the right to doubt him without further proof."

"They were found in his possession," he replied, hotly as herself. "He was found making presents of them. And as for further proof we have it in his silence. If he is innocent why does he refuse to clear himself?"

"I don't know. He has good reasons for it. If guilty why did he give me that silk, and so bring it directly before your eyes?"

"I did not consider that," he said, thoughtfully.

"You did not consider anything," was her bitter reply. "You acted as hastily as if he had been an utter stranger, and caught in the act of robbery. It is certain that you did not consider me. I and my feelings and position were quite left out of the account."

"I think we had better close this conversation," he mildly answered. "You are hot and passionate now. When you are cooler you can better appreciate my action."

"I appreciate it now," she replied, more hotly still. "Not content with having him seized as a felon you must enter my room, search among my things, carry off that miserable bow, make me a party to this base persecution of my lover. And this all hidden from me. My room entered as by a thief in the night, and robbed of its treasures. Why did you not ask me for the silk?"

"I took it from your table, where it lay conspicuously. I did not deem it necessary to ask you. Nor do I like such language as this."

"You have laid yourself open to it by your action," she answered, pacing the floor with an excitement that would not let her keep still. "I will cling to my lover, sir, whatever you do with him. You cannot turn me against him. He is an innocent, injured man. And I will not be made a party to this vile persecution. I demand a return of the bow that was taken from my room without my knowledge."

"You cannot have it," he replied, his cheek flushed with anger. "It is in the hands of the authorities. And there it must remain as evidence."

"You have robbed me, and I will not submit to it," she passionately replied.

"I have only possessed myself of my own, which was robbed from me," he sharply answered. "Here thousands of dollars' worth of goods and money are stolen from me. I am in danger of being ruined by these mysterious robberies. At length I get on the trail of the thieves. I find one person open to the strongest suspicion. I arrest him and secure the proof against him. And now you would have me stay my hand, close the door I have opened, and allow myself to be blindly ruined. I feel for you, Jennie, but you are not reasonable to-day. I must protect myself."

"And ruin me and my betrothed. And by mere sophistry. You know the proof against him is but a shadow. You know he is innocent, and will explain himself in time. But, no, you send an officer to him, who asks him some impudent questions, and arrests him because he declines to answer so suddenly. I uphold him in not answering now. Neither would I if treated so unjustly."

"He has laid himself open to it," Mr. Leonard replied.

"Then am I open to it," she hotly rejoined, laying her hand on the table, and looking him fiercely in the eyes. "The silk was found in my possession. I refused to tell where I got it, both to you and to your insulting minion, Wilson. Why did you not arrest me? There was all and more evidence against me than against him. I have not yet admitted that it came from him."

"We know it well enough," he replied.

"As for his silence I doubt not it has as good warrant as mine."

"Yours is explained. His is not. The law is no respecter of such scruples."

"Very well, Mr. Leonard," she more quietly replied. "You have shown your hand fully, and established yourself as my declared enemy. I can no longer remain under your roof. Two houses must hold us from this henceforth. I cast my lot with John Elkton. I will be true to him whatever betide, and a foe to his foes."

"Now, child, you are talking pure nonsense," said Mr. Leonard, gravely. "I cannot consent to any such madness. It would look well, indeed, to let you seem as if driven from my house."

"There would be no seeming about it. I am driven from your house. I have stayed in it as long as my self-respect will permit."

"You are my ward. My child in the law. I will not consent to your going."

"I am a woman, and mistress of my actions. I will go."

"This is madness, girl. Go where? What is to become of you? Who is to take care of you?"

"I am not friendless, sir. I can find refuge with

people who will consider me before their own self-interest."

"You must not, you shall not act like a spoiled child!" he said, vigorously. "I never thought that you would accuse me of lack of interest in you. I that have done so much for you, far more than you know or conjecture. If you knew all you would not treat me so."

"If I knew all! What is there for me to know?"

"I cannot tell you now, Jennie. I have been more a friend to you than you imagine, and it pains me to have you turn on me in this way."

"This is a new mystery, Mr. Leonard," replied Jennie. "I cannot engage to be grateful for something I never heard of, and do not seem likely to hear of. I know you only as my guardian, the custodian of moneys left by my father. You have been kind and considerate to an unruly child, I admit. But you are in this case neither kind nor considerate."

"I am more than your guardian," he replied. "There is a secret connected with your life which I have been charged to reveal when you come of age."

"A secret! A disgraceful secret!" she cried. "How could I, a child, have incurred any disgrace? What is this secret? I am not afraid of it. These half-revelations are tenfold worse than silence. Does it affect my father?"

"Your father. He was an honorable man. There is no whisper against him."

"My father! You emphasize this as if he was not my father. I demand to know what you mean by these innuendoes. It is not fair, sir, to revenge yourself on my just indignation by such an insinuation as this."

"I have said too much, Jennie. More than I thought of saying at this time. I withdraw it all."

"Withdraw!" she cried, with a scornful accent. "You cannot withdraw a storm that has been let loose. Silence now is worse than the truth. What am I to think of such language? Who is my father and what has he done to disgrace me? I must have an answer."

"I do not speak of disgrace. There are misfortunes that are no disgrace."

"What misfortune, then?"

"I will say no more now. I have said too much already. Some day when you are cooler, and will not think me revengeful I will tell you to what I allude."

"And meanwhile leave me to miserable conjectures," she said, sinking wearily in her chair.

"You have no occasion for it. Dismiss this matter from your mind for the present. But you must give up your foolish idea of leaving my house."

"You have driven me to it," she said, flushing up again.

"You are blinding yourself now, Jennie, and wronging me."

"I don't know. I don't know anything!" she cried, passionately. "I only know that my lover is in prison, that he is innocent, and that you have placed him there. I know no more, and can bear no more now."

With hasty movement she rose and left the room, her face haunting him with its pain and reproach.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILL PREPARES FOR WORK.

We left Will and his companion on a shed overlooking a band of conspirators. The long June twilight had just passed, the sky was overcast with clouds, and it was quite dark.

Will glanced in at the narrow aperture of the window. There was less than an inch of space left by the curtain. But this enabled him to catch a glimpse of a table, on which burnt a lamp, and to see the faces of the four men seated around it.

Black-eyed Joe stood back. He had just brought up some liquors.

Will could scarcely repress a chuckle of triumph. The face of the man whom he had last seen outside was now fully displayed. There was no doubt now, he knew him at a glance.

The face of a second looked familiar to him. The other two were strangers. His companion, however, seemed to know them.

"Them's gay nobs. High-toned cracksmen," he whispered. "I know just where to put my finger on them."

The men were still conversing, but in low tones, and only an occasional phrase reached the eager young ears at the window.

"Not safe now," was the first phrase caught.

"John Elkton is in prison. He won't blow."

"The West is the best field. After this scent gets cold."

"All safe, Joe?"

"Ay," said Joe, in a louder voice. "Up yonder. Stowed close."

He pointed with his finger over his left shoulder in an upward direction.

"Not so loud. There's ears below."

The voices now sunk lower, so that the spies heard nothing for some time.

Suddenly Will clapped his hand on his knee.

"Bet I've got him nailed now," he said, in an incautious whisper.

"Who?" asked Joe.

"The black-whiskered feller. Know him like a breeze."

The men grew still more earnest in their conversation.

"Will be in store about Thursday," came to the ears of the boys as their tones grew louder.

"And won't be looked after?"

"No, they think we're frightened off, and won't venture to touch this lot. I can give the cue if there's any change in the programme."

"We'd best touch it deep then. We might not get another chance soon. The secret way is all right yet?"

"Yes, not dreamed of."

"That's a lie," was Will's whispered comment. "I'll bet a cow you'll find a hornet in your box."

Their tones fell again, and nothing further came to the listeners' ears. The consultation soon after broke up, and there were signs of departure.

"Thursday night, then," said one.

"No. Friday night. They might be on guard on Thursday."

The boys slid down the shed, gained the fence, and in a moment had dropped to the ground outside.

"Now, Joe, we know our men, and don't need to follow them. Let's slide," said Will.

They lost no time in putting distance between them and that dangerous locality.

"Tell you what it is, Will," said Joe, leaning doggedly against a lamp-post. "There's something up. What is it?"

"Dead burglary, Joe. These fellers have been going through a friend of mine. Just hear their impudence, too. They've laid out a plan to rob him ag'in next Friday. But I'm on hand to spile their little game."

"Who's been robbed?"

"Can't tell you now. You'll know afore long. You'll get paid, too, for our fun to-night. You know where them cracksmen can be nabbed?"

"Mighty queer if I don't."

"That's the ticket. I'll call on you soon at headquarters in the square. Till then, mum's the word."

"I wouldn't blow; no more than an oyster," said Joe, indignantly.

"We'll split them then for to-night."

Will went his way, whistling his feelings in a very gay air.

He was diligent in his store duties for the next few days, being light-hearted in an unusual degree.

When Will was in his gay mood he was the life of the store, keeping up a constant breeze of amusement. Mr. Leonard had decided to let him alone in these outbursts of animal spirits, as he did not find that the liveliness engendered by Will interfered with the amount of labor performed, but rather aided it. So our young friend was left to sing, dance, joke, and otherwise upset the quiet of the store, to his heart's content.

And yet he fell into bitter disgrace before the week was out.

It was Thursday. They were engaged in getting in an invoice of very valuable goods. These were black silks of superior quality, and very costly.

Will labored vigorously, but with the utmost good humor, at the task of getting the cases into the store and lowering them into the basement, where it was decided to place them for the present.

Yet he could not repress his overflowing spirits, and executed a break-down between the lowering of one case and the receiving of another, that excited the laughter of the men, and the indignation of Mr. Wilson, who was passing.

"See here, boy," he cried. "We don't hire you for a negro minstrel or for a ballet-dancer. You've raised disturbance enough in the store already. Now I want this thing stopped."

"I'll try," said Will demurely. "But my legs sometimes kick up all of a sudden. I catch myself dancing afore I know it."

"You had better know it, and well, in the future. I warn you now that the next time you attempt it you will be sent about your business."

"I'm about my bizness now," said Will, as he lent a hand to the next case.

"You have entirely too much impudence, boy. I will not have these pert answers."

"Dunno how you're goin' to help it. My tongue's just as hard to manage as my legs."

"You have got to manage it, then," cried Mr. Wilson, in sudden anger. "If not here, then somewhere else. Your insolence is getting unbearable."

"You didn't hire me, and I ain't taking no discharge from you."

"I'll see if you won't," cried Wilson.

"Now you get back to your end of the ship, and don't be annoying a gentleman at his work," said Will, impatiently. "You're worse than a bad oyster. You'd best slide if you know when your mother's pet is well off."

"Why you insolent, rascally young beggar!" Mr. Wilson could hardly speak for rage. "That comes from taking vagrants off the street. You shall get out of this store, or I will."

He made as if he would take Will by the shoulders and put him out bodily, then and there.

"You can get, soon as you want," said Will, standing erect and coolly eying him. "Dunno that you're much use here, long side of me. Willful Will ain't to be spared."

"I'll see about that," cried Wilson, doubly enraged, as some of the men laughed. "This is the second specimen of your insolence and it shall be the last. If there's more of it I shall put you out myself."

"Don't try it on," said Will, lifting his straight, athletic figure. "If you lay a finger on me I'll double you up like a jack-knife. I could carry down a dozen mules like you. Now get, and blow to Mr. Leonard, and I don't care three darns what you tell him. Look out though, that I don't get a ring in your nose afore you're a week older, if you try it on."

Wilson seemed incapable of further speech. He went hastily back.

"You're a fool, Will. You've got your walking-papers," said one of the men.

"Bet a dollar I ain't," said Will, easily. "I ain't taking no discharge now."

"But you forget that Wilson has principal authority in the store, and great influence with Mr. Leonard."

"I don't keer the wink of a cat's eye for Gus Wilson. He's had more say here than he's goin' to have. Think I'll take his place afore long, if Mr. Leonard will give me salary enough. Let him hoe his prettiest row, and see if I don't come out ahead."

"That's all talk, Will. I am afraid you have done for yourself."

"Them that lives longest will see the most," was Will's answer.

Ten minutes after Will received a peremptory summons to the office.

He walked back with his most independent air, entered the office, and coolly helped himself to a chair opposite Mr. Leonard, who was seated alone.

"I did not ask you to seat yourself," said the latter in a displeased tone.

"I was afraid you wouldn't. That's why I helped myself," said Will, nonchalantly. "We're goin' to have consider'able talk, and I'm too tired to stand."

"I don't think we will have much talk," said the merchant, sharply. "A few words will conclude my business with you."

"But not mine with you," said Will.

"You are too much inclined to answer back," said Mr. Leonard, severely. "That is your main fault. I am satisfied with you otherwise, but cannot permit insolence in my establishment. You have talked in a shamefully insolent manner to Mr. Wilson. Now that is nearly the same as if you had used such language to me. I am sorry for the necessity, Will, but will have to discharge you. I had hoped better things of you."

"It isn't the same," said Will, quickly. "You wouldn't talk to me as he does, and there's where the difference comes in. If a feller comes to me like a slave-driver it's all very pretty, but I guess he'll find I don't drive."

"Men don't measure their language in speaking to boys. You must expect to put up with hasty speech."

"Boys have got souls," said Will, indignantly.

"Tain't what I've been used to, to be talked to like a dog."

"I am sorry, Will, that there is such a break between you and Mr. Wilson. I will have to support him. You must go."

"What! for Gus Wilson? Not if I know myself."

I wouldn't stayed here a week, Mr. Leonard, if you hadn't been a straight man. You suit me pretty well, and I ain't taking no discharge."

"This is nonsense, boy," said the merchant, severely. "You will have to go."

"I'll bet my next year's salary that Gus Wilson goes first," said Will, setting his hat rakishly on his head.

"Come, there is enough of this," said Mr. Leonard, rising. "I will pay you what is due you, and hope this experience may be a lesson to you in the next place you may get."

"Set down, Mr. Leonard," said Will, easily. "May be you're done; but I ain't quite through yet."

The merchant stood looking down at the independent boy with an air of surprise. He had not met such a character before.

"What have you got to say?" he asked.

"Well, the first thing is, that I ain't only goin' to spend my days here, but calculate to spend my nights here, too."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have got in a lot of fine goods, and that the thieves are goin' for them to-morrow night."

"Mr. Fitler, the detective, don't think so."

"He be blowed. He's good for straight work, but not good for crooked job like this. I'm goin' to be detective, and to spend to-morrow night in your cellar. There's rats there that want to be smelt out. Set down," he continued, as the merchant looked incredulous. "It won't be my first night there. I've got something to tell you."

Mr. Leonard's incredulity changed to intense interest as Will proceeded to describe his former night in the cellar, and what he had seen there.

"Can it be possible?" he cried. "Why did you not tell me this before?"

"I was waiting for it to get ripe," said Will, quietly.

"Set still; I ain't done yet."

He proceeded with a description of his last evening's adventure, and of his recognition of the parties concerned, though declining just then to tell who they were.

"But this is most important," said the merchant, breathlessly. "I must send for Mr. Fitler at once."

"If you do, I wash my hands clean of it," said Will. "I ain't taking no pards in bizness."

"But we need his advice."

"We don't want none of it. I tell you what we do want."

"Well?"

"We want to keep still tongues. If this thing is talked of, our dog's dead. I'll tell you this much, there's a traitor in the store. If there's a whisper gets out all our fun goes for nothing. I want to find out how them things are got out of the cellar."

"You are right, Will. I shall not speak of it."

"Nor don't look it, nor wink it, nor let it out in anyway. There will be somebody doubtful of our long talk here. Tell Gus Wilson and the rest of them that I begged off, and made you promise me another week's trial."

"Very well. I shall do so. No one shall learn anything from me."

"Not Wilson, nor Fitler, nor none of them. The job can't be done if it gets in the wind."

"But how will you manage to remain after night without its being known?"

"Easy enough. You send me away just afore six. Trust me to snake my way back."

"I think you can do it, Will. You had best go into the store now."

Will went quietly out, leaving the merchant plunged in deep thought.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRISON CELL.

JOHN ELKTON had been a week in prison. His arrest had excited much indignation among his friends, who had a high opinion of his character. His silence, however, in regard to the damaging charge against him excited distrust in some, even his friends. His employer was one of these. He offered to see that John was released on bail, if he would only explain to him this mystery. But John would not explain, and did not want bail.

He was moody and unhappy in his contracted prison cell, and grew cross and nervous as the long days wore on. The monotony was broken by frequent visits from his friends, some of whom were very attentive to him. But with all this the hours dragged, and the place grew bitterly tiresome.

One thing wore on him more than aught else. He had seen and heard nothing of Jennie Arlington. How was his disgrace going to affect her? He did not believe that she could turn from him for an unproved crime, but she was under the direct influence of his enemies, and what stories might not be told, and what arguments brought to bear on her?

He was fully aware of the natural conclusion from his persistent silence, and could not blame people for distrusting his innocence. But he had fondly hoped that she had more confidence in him, and would not turn away from him so lightly.

But as the days wore on and she came not he began to fear that she was lost to him, and to grow miserably unhappy in consequence.

Another thing seemed to annoy him. Some of his friends kept aloof from him, one in particular of whom he had had a very exalted opinion, and whose absence caused him much mental disquiet. He finally sent a message to this man, Jesse Powers by name, with an urgent request to have him come to the prison and see him.

It failed in its effect. His friend was out of town and did not get his epistle.

It was nearly the end of the first week of prison life when the door of his cell was one morning unlocked, and a new visitor admitted. He had been given a privilege which few of the prisoners enjoyed, of having both doors opened, and visitors admitted within the grating.

He sat disconsolate and moody, fretting in spirit at the defection of his betrothed, when he lifted his eyes and saw her standing before him, her eyes full of love and sympathy.

"Oh, John!" was her piteous exclamation.

He sprang to his feet with new life, clasped her in his arms, and rained kisses on her distressed face.

"This is very good in you, Jennie," he said. "I have just been thinking of you, and wishing for you; but not hoping."

"You did not think I had forgotten you?" she said, reproachfully.

"No, no, Jennie; I had faith in your love. But how did I want you?"

He kissed her again, clasping her still closer.

"And what a place this is," she said, looking round the cell. "I would have been here before, John, but I was hindered. I thought, indeed, the first few days, that you would not stay here."

"How could I help myself, Jennie? No bird would stay in its cage if the door was open."

"You could open the door with a word. You know you could," she said, looking tenderly but eagerly into his face. "You are innocent. Why will you not clear yourself?"

"It looks as if I were guilty," he replied, leading her to the only chair the cell afforded. "The law and the public seem to think so."

"It is your own fault, John. You are incomprehensible. Why are you so silent? I cannot guess a reason. You must clear yourself."

"And convict others?"

"If they are guilty, yes."

"There are things that cannot be told, Jennie, and reasons why I should not convict even the guilty. I hope you will not press this matter further. I have not taken my course without excellent reasons. If you knew all, you would counsel me to do as I have done. Let that suffice. It pains me to have to refuse you."

Jennie was silent for a little, thinking. She clasped his hand with a warm pressure. His gladdened eyes were fixed eagerly upon her face.

"Let it be so," she said, at length. "For the present, at least, we will forget it."

The conversation changed. Seated upon the floor at her feet, and looking lovingly up into her eyes, their talk grew of softer themes. Their voices fell, mellowed by love. Hours, it seemed to them, they conversed in that sweet love gossip so hard to translate, so weak and meaningless when put into words. Looks, tones, hand-pressure, form the soul of lovers' talk, and these no pen can write down. The words spoken are dreadfully prosy to outsiders; all the poetry lies in the language of lips and eyes.

"Your friends have all visited you, then?" she at length asked.

"Not all. Nearly all," he replied. "Their kindness has helped me greatly."

"Could they do less, and be friends?" she quickly replied. "I do not think much of those who have failed to come."

"I do not blame them. They might have been away, or unable to come. And my very equivocal position is a very good reason for their absence."

"It's no reason at all," she broke out. "They are

no friends of yours to desert you in your extremity."

"Well, well, Jennie, there are only three or four."

"Let me know their names."

"And why?" he asked, laughing. "Are you going to put them in your black book?"

"No matter. I want to know their names," she excitedly replied.

"You are the most persistent creature," he said, teasingly. "Wait till I find out that they have really deserted me. Then I will deliver them over to your vengeance."

"That is no answer," she said, determinedly.

"Their names?"

"I see there is no escape, he replied, with a hearty laugh. "Grant me a few days, that I may notify them what to expect."

"Not an hour. Not five minutes," she replied, with a touch of his own humor.

"Well, since it must be, it must be," he said, resignedly. "First, there is Ellis Branson. Have you him down?"

"Yes. Go on," she said, writing down the name, with a merry smile.

"Harry Howard."

"Proceed."

"James Milton."

"And the next?"

"Is not that enough?" he said. "You have three good names there."

"Not enough unless it is all," she replied, with an earnest look.

"That is all the names I can give you, Jennie," he said, more seriously. "This is an odd whim of yours, however. I do not know what you can want with them."

"That is my secret," she said, gayly. "I have a right to my secrets, too. Come, John, there are more. Give me another victim."

"Jennie, I don't quite like this," he replied. "Do you know you are acting strangely?"

"Not half as strangely as you," she replied. "Are there any more names?"

"I decline to answer," he said, with a slight frown on his brow.

"There, I do believe the absurd man is getting angry," she exclaimed, laughing. "I must leave now, before the thunder-clouds arise."

"No, no! Not so soon. You have been here no time. I will smile like a summer's day if you will only remain."

"Listen to the tramp of that turnkey's feet. He is getting impatient of our happiness. I must really go now."

"To return soon?"

"Yes. I am staying in the city now. I will not leave you alone."

A few more parting words, and she left the cell.

The turnkey, a young, pleasant-looking man, attended her toward the great door of the prison.

"It is a horrible place this," she said, shuddering.

"I do not find it so, miss," he replied. "As for Mr. Elkton, he is very comfortable. You should see some of the other cells."

"I beg to decline," she said. "His is bad enough."

"We make it as easy for him as we can," said the officer. "And he is not lonely. He has plenty of visitors."

"Has he any privileges?"

"Oh, yes. He gets his meals outside. And he can have his friends in his cell, and can write to them and receive answers."

"He has written to some of them, then?" she asked, quickly.

"Only one letter, I believe."

"Any answer?"

"No, miss."

"Did he seem to expect one?"

"Oh, yes. And quite worried that it did not come."

"I cannot imagine who it could have been. I know most of his friends, and would have thought they would be careful to answer him. I am engaged to Mr. Elkton, you know," she said, with a slight blush. "Do you remember the name of the person he wrote to?"

"Very well. It was Jesse Powers. I took the letter myself, as I had an errand in the city."

"Did you see him?"

"No. He was absent from home."

"The name is familiar. Where did he live?"

"No, 1,485 North Tenth street."

"Thank you. Excuse my curiosity. Women will be asking questions, you know."

The turnkey smiled as he opened the gate.

"Jesse Powers," she said, with compressed lips, on getting outside. "That is the name he refused to tell me. I believe I am on the track of the mystery."

CHAPTER XX.

MR. SOMERS'S STORY.

"I HAVE been a very unfortunate man," said old Mr. Somers, to a gentleman visiting him. "Not that I wish to parade my troubles, but I speak of them with the constant hope of receiving some important information."

"I am in a trade where a good deal of important information comes in," said the visitor. "Perhaps I may help you."

"You are a stranger to me, sir, but I judge from your manner you can sympathize with a father's misfortune. I will tell you my story."

"I will listen, and make no promises," said his visitor, smiling.

He had called on Mr. Somers and asked him a variety of questions which some would have considered impudent. But his manner was easy and quiet,

and the old gentleman answered him without hesitation.

"I am a lonely old man now," he proceeded, "yet I have a son and daughter, still living, I hope though I have lost sight of them for years."

"Indeed," said his visitor.

"It has been the one aim of my life to find them. I have not yet succeeded, and fear I never shall."

"Proceed, sir. Who knows but I may help you?"

"I was a poor man at the time of my wife's death," he said. "I have since acquired considerable property. I had an enemy."

"A poor man, too?"

"Yes, a mere vagrant. He smarted under some fancied injury that I had done him. He attacked me near my own home in relation to it. He was a violent-tongued man and insulted me. I was hot-tempered then and I punished him for his insults."

"Exactly, and made him revengeful!"

"My two children—mere infants then—were stolen one day, in which I was absent and my wife unwell. It is not necessary to enter into particulars. It is enough to say that we traced them to this vagrant. He was sharply pursued, but we never succeeded in finding him."

"That was indeed a misfortune."

"It killed my wife, and has made me a wanderer for years. I have constantly sought that villain, and the two precious ones he stole. Alas! he had too well covered up his track."

"And you have found no trace of him?"

"Nothing of his charge. I have traced him, but too late. He has escaped me by death. His secret is in the grave with him."

"Where did he die?"

"Here. In Philadelphia. That is why I have settled here. I have hopes that the children may still be alive and in this city."

"This is a decidedly interesting matter," said the visitor. "It is certainly worth while trying to trace the children. What was the man's name?"

"Jake Johnson was the name he was always known by."

"Have you set the police force of the city at work on this search?"

"No, I have not much confidence in them. I preferred to conduct it myself."

"You did wrong there. A thousand men, well posted about the city, are certainly better than one man not at all posted. Please tell me all you know about this man, how you discovered him, when he died and where he was buried."

Mr. Somers proceeded to do so, in a long narrative of no special interest to the reader.

"And he kept up his vagrant habits to the last?"

"Yes, but had not the children with him. I can trace him back for some months before his death, and he was alone during that period."

"He probably did not trouble himself with them long," said the visitor. "Men of that character, unless they can make some special use of them, do not care to be bothered with incumbrances. He has likely placed them somewhere where he calculated you would never find them."

"That may be so," said Mr. Somers, thoughtfully.

"But where?"

"That is what we need to consider," was the reply. "I should go first to the most obvious quarter. Men of his kind naturally gravitate to the poor-house. He may have dropped them in some such place. Have you searched the books of the poor-houses?"

"No," said Mr. Somers, greatly interested. "I never thought of that."

"You see where your fault was, then, in depending too much on yourself, and not calling in the detective police. You forgot that it is the business of their lives to search out crimes and mysteries."

"I wish I had met you sooner. It would have been better than the detectives."

"I am a detective," was the reply.

"You are?" cried Mr. Somers, in great astonishment.

"Yes, sir. My name is Fitler. I thank you for your confidence in this matter. If you wish I will undertake to work it up. I am in doubt, though, that it may be too late."

"I shall be too happy to have the services of a shrewd man like you. I see I have done you officers injustice. But why have you, a detective, called on me and asked me so many questions?"

"I will tell you," said Mr. Fitler, "since I am satisfied, from your answers, that I was on a wrong track. You know a boy called Will Somers?"

"I know no such boy!" cried the old gentleman, excitedly. "If I did I should know my own son, for that was his name. Why do you ask me such a question as that?"

"Because you certainly do know him, and have had visits from him. It is that brings me here."

"I do not understand you," said Mr. Somers, in perplexity. "The only boy I know of is one engaged in Mr. Leonard's dry-goods store. He saved me from being crushed under a street car. I have been very grateful to him, and have called on him, and made him visit me."

"And that is that all?" said the officer, laughing. "You do not know what suspicions have been excited."

"But Will Somers, you say. Is that his name? I did not ask him."

"That is his name."

"Do you think it possible he may be my son?" asked the old gentleman, pathetically. "I do hope he may, for I have been strangely drawn toward him. I love him already."

"It is not impossible," was the reply. "Will has had a rough life in the streets. I do not know his antecedents."

"Heaven send he may prove my son," said the

old man, with tears in his eyes. "He is none the worse for his rough life. He is noble, brave, strong and beautiful. I would be glad to call him son."

"And looks like you, Mr. Somers."

"Do you really think so? I had a thought that way. That is another important link."

"Do not build too high on this chance. You may be disappointed. It is worth investigating though."

"Yes, yes, it shall be, thoroughly. I must see him this very day—this very hour. But the suspicions you speak of. What are they?"

Mr. Fitler proceeded to give him an outline of the robberies in Mr. Leonard's store, and Will's connection with them.

"But do you think that my boy—I must call him my boy—do you think he had anything to do with them? I cannot believe it. He is too straightforward and noble."

"I believe he is perfectly innocent, and for the very reasons you give. It don't do, though, for a detective to rest under a belief. We find, sometimes, the most honest appearance to cover robbery. I make it a rule to follow every trail, no matter how unpromising it seems."

"You have not much faith in human nature, then?"

"Not an over stock. My experience has not been very much calculated to make me trust people."

"I trust Will, then. I wish I could see him this minute."

His wish was granted. At that minute Will was announced.

He came in with his usual easy, indifferent air, nodded to Mr. Fitler, with a look of surprise at seeing him there, and shook hands with Mr. Somers.

"Back ag'in, you see, according to promise."

"Sit down; I wish to talk with you," said his host, with suppressed excitement.

"I can take it standing up," said Will; "except you're goin' to talk me to death, and then I'd best vamoose."

Mr. Fitler leaned easily back in his chair, closely observing the two.

"Is your father living?" commenced Mr. Somers, in the tone of a cross-examiner.

"Guess not; never seen him."

"And your mother?"

"Don't know as I ever had one."

"That is a strange story. Where did you grow up?"

"Come from where mighty few men care to go—from the poor-house," said Will, nonchalantly.

Mr. Somers gave a start, and looked intelligently at the officer.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Will Somers."

"Why did you not tell me that before?" he said, a glad light upon his face.

"Cause it was the same as yours. Thought maybe you might want to be making yourself my uncle or something of that sort. I was afraid you might get too familiar. Calkered I wouldn't take in no relations."

"I may be nearer yet," began Mr. Somers; "I may be."

He was checked by a sign from Mr. Fitler. Will stood looking from one to the other, with growing surprise on his face. What could they be after?

"I have never heard anything of your early life, Will," said Mr. Fitler. "I would be glad to know something more about it. Have you any recollection of the man who left you in the alms-house?"

"Not much," said Will. "I've heard he was a seedy-looking customer. Wouldn't take him in now as my dad, if that's what's up. Don't owe him any thanks."

"Were you alone?"

"Oh, no! there was two of us. I had the nice little sister w.th me; or maybe I was the little one for she was older than me. Poor little thing, I've lost her altogether."

Mr. Somers gave a quick start of delight as Will proceeded.

"How came you to lose her?"

"We was both took out. I've heard that some rich folks adopted my sister, and wouldn't let nothing be known about her. I was took out, too, by poor folks. They made me work like a dog, till I run away and shifted for myself."

"Did you never have any curiosity to inquire about your father?"

"Not much. He didn't seem to care about me; and spouse a ragged chap like me had gone there askin' questions, what'd come of it? I suppose they'd clapped me into a cell for a vagrant."

"Do you know your sister's name?"

"I think I'd forget my own afore I did hern," said Will, reproachfully.

"What was it?"

"A pretty name—Jennie—Jennie Somers," said Will, dwelling affectionately on the name.

Mr. Somers sprung from his chair in intense excitement, and began vigorously to pace the floor.

Will watched him with surprise. He had yet gained no conception of the mystery; he did not know that the old man was burning to clasp him in his arms.

"I am not questioning you without an object," said Mr. Fitler, "as you will learn after awhile. I will have to carry this matter to the alms-house, and examine their books and make inquiries, before we can go further. It is a pity you do not remember the name of your reputed father."

"Who said I didn't?" asked Will. "He wasn't no father of mine, for I recollect he treated me bad. What's more, he left me there under a different name from that he carried himself."

"What was that name?" asked Mr. Somers, facing Will closely, and looking with eager inquiry into his eyes.

"Jake Johnson."

With a loud cry of joy, Mr. Somers sprung forward and clasped Will in his arms.

"My son! my son!" he cried, "my long-lost, long-sought son! Oh! this is too great joy! Have I found you at last, my dearly-loved son?"

Will struggled in this close embrace, and looked inquiringly at Mr. Fitter.

"He is right, Will. There is no doubt that he is your father," said the latter.

With a strong muscular exertion Will pushed the old man from him, his hands firmly grasping his shoulders, and looked him sternly in the eye.

"If you are my father, why was I left in the poor-house? Why did you turn me loose on the world?" he bitterly asked.

"My God! I turn you loose! You were stolen from me by an enemy. I would have lost my heart's blood first. Oh! my son, can you repulse me, and my whole soul yearning for your love?"

A flush of emotion came into Will's face at this heartfelt appeal. He yielded silently to his father's embraces. Their souls were united in that warm clasp.

"I must leave you," said Mr. Fitter, looking nervously at his watch. I will go at once to the almshouse. I will pursue this matter. Your daughter must be found."

"God bless you," said Mr. Somers, pressing his hand gratefully. "I owe you more than I can ever repay. Don't fail to tell me without delay what you learn. Put everything to work. I will pay liberally for it all."

Mr. Fitter bowed himself out, as if eager to escape. He left father and son, with clasped hands, seated in earnest and loving conversation.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE INITIALS.

"Is Mr. Powers in?" inquired a lady's voice, at North 10th street, No. 1,485.

"Not at present," was the reply. "But we expect him every minute. He does not leave the store till after five o'clock."

"In what store is he engaged?" asked the lady.

"At Brown and Felger's, on Market street."

"I will wait a few minutes, if you are sure he will not be long."

"Please step into the parlor, miss. He will soon be here."

The visitor seated herself in the small, but neatly-furnished parlor. A few pictures hung there, which she occupied herself in examining while impatiently awaiting the coming of Mr. Powers.

"Brown and Felger. That is next door to Mr. Leonard's," she said, in an undertone. "Does that indicate anything?"

Her soliloquy was interrupted by the opening of the front door, and after several minutes by the entrance of a gentleman to the parlor.

He was a tall, rather portly man, with black whiskers, and a restless, shifting look in his eyes that impressed his visitor unpleasantly.

"Mr. Powers?" she asked.

"That is my name," he replied. "Whom have I the honor to meet?"

"My name is Arlington," she replied.

"Miss Jennie Arlington?"

"Yes, sir. May I ask how you have learned my name?"

"I have heard of you," he said, with some hesitation. "You know I am engaged next door to Mr. Leonard's."

"More probably you know of me through your friend, John Elkton."

"Yes, yes, very likely. I remember, you are engaged to Mr. Elkton."

"Have you known him long?"

"For several years."

"You have not been to see him in his present misfortune. He wrote to you but his letter failed to reach you. I thought I would call and request you to visit him."

"Why, Miss Arlington," he said, confusedly, "I have really been too busy. I have felt for him in his misfortune, for John is really an excellent man. I am sorry for him."

"On what account, sir?"

"Of this unpleasant difficulty. I cannot believe that he is guilty of the charge against him. I do not know their proof, but think they could hardly have arrested a man like him without sufficient evidence."

"You should take the time to call on him, sir, if you have not lost your friendship for him. All his friends have been there."

"Then he cannot be lonely," said Mr. Powers, laughing. "The fact is, the visiting hours at the prison come in my busiest time."

"Mr. Elkton and you were close friends?"

"He seemed to think a great deal of me," was the cautious answer.

"Then the feeling was not returned?" she quickly asked.

"Oh, yes! In a measure. I had much respect for John. For his part he would persist in feeling grateful to me."

"Yes. You had rendered him a service," she said, assuming a knowledge which she did not possess.

"Not much," he said, quietly. "No doubt, though, he had reason to view it strongly. I saved his life by pulling him from the river. It was easy enough for me to do, but he seemed to think it the greatest favor."

"He had reason," she replied.

"I begin to see through John's action now," she said to herself. "The gratitude of an honorable man is a strong feeling. Has he allowed it to make him take the place of a guilty man?"

"I would very much like to call on John," he said. "And will if I can spare the time. I hope he bears his imprisonment well."

"Not very well," she replied. "It is having a very serious effect upon him."

"I am sorry to hear that," was his easy answer.

"You know, I presume, the cause of his imprisonment?" she asked, shifting her chair so that she could look him more directly in the face.

"Not fully. It is on suspicion of being concerned in a robbery at Mr. Leonard's."

"It is on account of his having a small piece of the stolen goods," she said. "He will not explain how he obtained it. In consequence he has laid himself open to suspicion."

"It has a doubtful look," replied Mr. Powers, his eyes uneasily shifting.

"Though the public does not know, I know the whole affair," she earnestly replied. "I have learned where he got the silk. You have seen this before, Mr. Powers?" she displayed the fatal bow, which again had fallen into her possession.

"I can't say that I have," he replied, looking at it very closely.

"Not in that shape, perhaps. But the silk, I mean. That is the piece of silk you gave John Elkton."

A slight, uneasy movement followed her words. He looked closely at the silk.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "I never saw it before."

She rose to her feet, her large eyes scanning him from head to foot. He sat unmoved, with no trace of feeling or confusion in his face.

"You know better," she cried, indignantly. "You gave it to John Elkton, as I happen to know. You will permit that man to languish in prison, rather than come up and acknowledge the truth. You must be seriously afraid of the truth in this matter, Mr. Powers. He is a grateful and honorable man. He will suffer himself rather than let suspicion reach you. But there is nothing hinders me from speaking. I owe you no gratitude."

"There is one thing that should hinder you," he quietly replied.

"What is that?" she quickly asked.

"The fact that all you are saying now is pure guesswork. Your lover has told you nothing of the kind; and cannot, for it is not the truth. Let me advise you, Miss Arlington, not to be too ready to jump to conclusions in future."

"I will bid you good-evening, Mr. Powers," she replied, with dignity. "I see that there is no use to prolong our conversation. I have learned all I desired."

He smiled derisively as she left the room. In a moment more she was on the street. She felt faint, and needed the touch of the fresh air to revive her. She had felt far more emotion during this interview than she had displayed.

She walked slowly down toward her present home. She was staying with a friend in the city now, having left her home after her stormy interview with her guardian.

A familiar voice at her elbow caused her to turn.

There stood Willful Will, a smile of welcome on his face.

"Glad to see you," he said. "Late in the city to-night."

"Yes. I am on a visit here," she replied.

They walked along together, engaged in conversation. Will was insensibly drawn into a description of his late discovery of a father and of his hopes of yet finding his lost sister. Jennie was greatly interested in this romantic story, and joined earnestly with him in the hope that he would yet succeed in finding his sister.

"Did she look like you?" she asked.

"Yes. Something your color hair and eyes. And then you look something like me. I wish it would only turn out that you were my lost Jennie."

She laughed in great amusement at the idea.

"I like you, Will," she said, "but hardly with a sisterly love, and I do not think you would be much credit to the family in society. I am glad to see, though, that you are improving."

"You won't be ashamed of me after a while," he replied. "Just give me time. Tain't easy to rub off an old stain; you must wear it out."

"Your new position, as the son and heir of a wealthy man, ought to aid you. I suppose your plans are changed. You will be leaving the store and going to school."

"Dunno yet," said Will, indifferently. "Ain't laid any plans. Bound to find my sister, if she's living; that's one job. But I've got another job to put through first. I'm on the track of the burglars that have gone through Mr. Leonard's store."

"Ah!" she said, with sudden interest. "Have you learned anything about them?"

"On their trail. Bound to bring them up standing," said Will, positively. "Keep mum. Ain't told Mr. Leonard yet."

"Do you know a man named Jesse Powers?" she asked, eagerly. "He's engaged in the store next to Mr. Leonard's."

"Never heered the name afore," said Will. "What sort of a chap?"

"A large man, with dark complexion, and black hair and whiskers. Rather full-faced, and with prominent nose."

"My stars!" cried Will, clapping his hand on his knee, with a burst of laughter. "That's his photograph to a hair. Do I know him? Don't I! What do you say's his name?"

"Jesse Powers."

"J. P. or I don't know my own name. That's the identical chap that wrote the letter. Don't happen to have a scrap of his handwriting?"

"No. For what purpose do you want it?"

"To nail a thief, that's all. Didn't I see the very chap in a nest of burglars? What do you know about him?"

"I know that he gave Mr. Elkton the piece of silk which has been the cause of his imprisonment."

"Better and better. Mr. Elkton won't blow on him."

"No. He is under obligation to him."

"You and me ain't under no obligation. Don't you be worried about Elkton. Bet I fetch him out of quod inside of two days. Could you get a specimen of that chap's handwriting?"

"Very probably. I might get a note from him to Mr. Elkton."

"The very dodge!" cried Will, in enthusiasm. "You're quick at a hint. Work it on him and I'll do the rest. Bet between us we sell him out. Bring it down to the store as soon as you nail it, and hand it to me. Ask for Mr. William Somers, and anybody will go for me."

"I will try," she answered, laughingly. "And now I must bid you good-day, Will."

"Good-by, Jennie. Tell you what, I'd give half my fortune to come if you was only my little lost sister, Jennie."

"You will find her yet, Will. Your love will bring you to her."

"You can bet I will love her amazing when I find her," said Will, as he hastened away to hide an unloved softening at the eyes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET OUT.

It was Friday. The goods taken in the previous day had been examined and found correct. Mr. Leonard, however, in accordance with his promise to Will, had kept faithfully the latter's secret. Not even Mr. Wilson, his confidential clerk, was aware that the cellar was to contain a sentinel the coming night.

He had mentioned it, indeed, despite Will's caution, to the detective. The latter had been quite successful in his visit to the almshouse, and had found quite satisfactory evidence that Will was indeed Mr. Somers's son. This change of position had raised our hero to a still higher place in the officer's estimation, and he placed great reliance on Will's shrewdness.

He had also found important traces of the missing sister, which, however, he had not yet been able to work out to any safe conclusion.

The merchant and detective were seated in earnest conversation this afternoon, the latter in the same disguise in which he had formerly visited the store. He had deemed it inadvisable to appear in his ordinary dress on the eve of a new enterprise of the burglars, lest they should be frightened off.

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Will, in company with Miss Arlington.

He turned a quizzical look upon the apparent country merchant as he politely handed the lady a seat.

Mr. Leonard looked on in utter surprise at this unexpected visit.

"I've got a trifle of secret bizness with you, Mr. Leonard," said Will, quietly. "But your friend needn't go. I guess he won't blow."

"Secret business?" repeated Mr. Leonard. "Well, as it is no secret from all present, let us have it."

"Ever see that handwriting before?" asked Will, handing an open letter to the country merchant.

"Me?" said the latter, in surprise.

"Yes, you," replied Will. "Didn't think you sold me with that toggery, I hope? Know you like a breeze, Mr. Fitter. Jist look at that letter."

"You needn't be afraid of that boy not being shrewd enough," said the officer to Mr. Leonard, viewing Will with admiration. "Ah! where did you get this?" he exclaimed, as he glanced at the letter.

"You know it then?" asked Will.

"Of course I do. It is the very handwriting of the scrap we found in the cellar signed Jessie Powers. The same initials, J. P. This is most important. Who is Jessie Powers?"

"He is the man who gave Mr. Elkton the scrap of silk which has consigned him to a prison cell," said Miss Arlington, excitedly. "He little dreamed that it would fall into my hands, and under the eyes of the man whom he had robbed. So it is that villains fail when most they seem secure."

"But how have you learned this?" cried Mr. Leonard. "Through Mr. Elkton?"

"No. He was too loyal to his friend to reveal it. He owed this man a debt of gratitude, and was willing to repay it by suffering in his stead, rather than injure one who had saved his life. It was I who learned the secret, and who obtained from Powers a letter addressed to his imprisoned friend. That letter ter you now hold."

"Where can this man be found?"

"In Brown and Felger's store, next door to you."

"This is so. I know him," cried Mr. Leonard.

"Shall we arrest him?"

"We will do nothing precipitately," said the officer. "We may be enabled after to-night's work, to arrest the whole gang. If you will excuse me I will take Will outside for a while. I wish to talk this matter over with him."

"Certainly," said Mr. Leonard.

The guardian and ward were left together.

Deep silence reigned between them. Neither appeared willing to break it. At length Mr. Leonard spoke:

"You have done me a great service, Jennie," he said. "To me and to Mr. Elkton both, in fact. Of course all charges against him will now be withdrawn, and he can be released at once. I am sorry you took the precipitate step you did in leaving my house. I hope that you have given no one your reasons, and that you will now return."

"Not until John Elkton is fully vindicated," she firmly replied.

"But he will be vindicated. There will not be a shadow of disgrace rest on him. This is no reason."

"It is not your fault that he is not disgraced," she earnestly replied. "I am sure that when the public know how nobly he has acted the disgrace of this affair will be changed to honor. But he has only himself to thank for it."

"I am sorry that you should assume such a tone," he replied. "I could not do otherwise than I did. His refusal to explain forced me to this arrest. You must return home Jennie."

"I have other reasons for not doing so," was her resolute answer.

"Other reasons?"

"Yes; you hinted at something disgraceful connected with me, yet refused to tell me what it was. You must explain this mystery ere I set foot in your house again."

"I was angry and spoke hastily," he answered. "I meant nothing."

"That is a subterfuge, Mr. Leonard," she said, looking sternly in his face. "I demand to know to what you referred."

"And I decline to tell. It is better you should not know."

"I might have been better," she firmly replied, "had you said nothing. But you should know that half-confidences are always worse than the truth. I cannot and will not rest content under such an imputation. I must know to what you refer."

"You will not thank me for telling you, Jennie. It had better rest in oblivion."

"It shall not rest," she indignantly cried. "If you do not reveal this mystery this is the last time I shall ever speak to you. There will be other ways of learning it."

"You would force me to a most unpleasant task," he replied.

"Be it so, sir. There are certain paths it is best never to start on, for there is no turning back."

"You must not blame me for what you force from me!"

"No, no, of course I will not," she cried, impatiently. "Unless you have yourself done me an injury. In that case I will make no promises."

"You would oblige me now to do you the only injury I have ever thought of."

"Proceed, sir. I can bear it, however severe your revelation may be."

"My revelation is simply this, Jennie," said the merchant, impressively. "You have no claim to the name of Arlington."

"No claim to my name?" she cried, clinching her hand on the chair.

"You were only an adopted daughter of Mr. Arlington's," he continued, as if in haste to dispose of an unpleasant subject.

"Can this be true? Who were my parents?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"But you hinted at disgrace. There is no disgrace in this."

"I said nothing of disgrace. I simply spoke of its being unpleasant."

"In what way? There is something behind all this. You would not have made so great a mystery of what you have told me. You know more. I demand to know the rest. From whom or whence did Mr. Arlington adopt me?"

"That is the one matter I prefer not to tell."

"And that I insist on knowing. You cannot and shall not stop now. You have told too much not to tell all. Whence did I come?"

"Since you are so persistent, Jennie, do not blame me," said the merchant, gravely. "He adopted you from the alms-house."

She gave a quick gasp, as of a person drowning; turned, and walked to the door w.th trembling step. In a moment she was gone.

It was the hardest blow her proud spirit could receive. Sick at heart she walked resolutely on, spurning the proffered sympathy of Mr. Leonard, who had followed her in alarm.

But we must accompany the reader to a different scene.

That night found Will Somers safely "at home" in the basement of Mr. Leonard's store, where he had managed to remain without attracting attention.

He did not act as on the previous occasion, but hid himself carefully away in a corner, among the numerous heavy cases that covered the floor. Here he awaited developments.

The hours slipped by and found Will resolutely awake. Sleep did visit his eyelids once or twice, but could not remain long with such a pressing weight upon his mind. Yet for a boy of his age, after a weary day's labor, and resting in quiet and darkness, it was almost impossible to resist slumber. After a hard fight, which lasted till late in the night, sleep was getting the best of him, and he was gradually sinking into a deeper oblivion than before, when he was suddenly and fully wakened by a peculiar noise.

With all his senses on the alert he listened attentively. It was the sound of muffled steps, and low, cautious voices. A faint light struck through the lines of boxes and reached his covert eye.

There seemed to be two or three persons besides himself. They were evidently acting carefully but hastily. The low, shuffling steps were incessant.

This lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes, during which time Will did not risk raising his head above the boxes. He was well satisfied as to what was going on.

At the end of this time the light receded, and the steps seemed to be going from him. The youthful spy rose, and cautiously followed, taking care that not a sound should arise from his movement.

The light was turned from him and he advanced in almost total darkness. It glimmered on the head of the sub-cellular stairs, where stood, sharply defined, the forms of two men.

Will could scarcely repress a chuckle of triumph as his quick eye recognized both these men.

"Bet there'll be fun to-morrow," he said to himself, as he cautiously followed.

Step by step he pursued the men, down the stairs, into the sub-cellar. There were three of them now. They were gathered in the corner of the cellar where the fragment of letter had been found.

The light faintly shone on several bundles of goods which they were handling. Will did not venture to advance, but remained in the darkness while some hasty evolutions were proceeding.

But what was this? The goods had disappeared. One—two—of the men were gone. Only the third remained.

Will pushed more boldly forward. He had seen a man disappear in almost the same spot on the former occasion of his cellar adventure. He had failed them to penetrate the mystery. He was determined not to be foiled now.

The light had gone. Only a faint glimmer remained. This, too, disappeared for a moment, and Will drew within a few feet of the mysterious spot.

The light again shone and at a flash the secret lay revealed before him. It shone from the neighboring cellar, through a hole quite large enough for a man to pass through. Through this hole the men and goods had passed into the cellar of the next-door store.

While Will stood looking in admiration at this contrivance two large stones were pushed back into the hole, fitting it closely, and leaving Will again in darkness. But mentally a new light had broken upon him.

"It's a good dodge, but if you ain't sold I'm a Hoosier!" was his only remark.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

The stores of Mr. Leonard and of Brown and Felger opened upon a narrow street, deserted at night, save that occasionally a passing policeman gazed down its dark depths.

On the night of the robbery, however, the three men Will had seen stood conversing just inside the rear door of Brown and Felger's establishment, the door standing ajar.

"Don't move till near morning," said one of them, cautiously. "The police may have been warned, and we will need to be wide awake. Wait till the milk-wagons and market-wagons are on the street."

"All right. Joe can play butcher," was the reply.

"We will have to leave Leonard alone for a good while to come, after this pull."

"I think we had best pay our addresses next to our stool-pigeon here. We have made enough off of your boss. We ought to give Powers's friend a good wakener, and then subside."

"Time enough to think about that," said the third.

"I will be off home now," said the first speaker, "and leave you two to finish the job."

The door was closed behind him as he left the store and carefully made his way along the street, seeking the deepest shadows, and keeping in close to the houses.

He stepped out more boldly after he had reached a main street. Late as the hour was, the street was not quite deserted. A few people were moving.

One of these, in fact, was moving quite closely behind the burglar, and seemed to be following him.

The latter was utterly surprised when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice sounded in his ear:

"You are my prisoner."

"What does this mean?" he cried, turning round in great indignation. "Who are you that dare molest a quiet traveler on the streets?"

"Save all that," said the other. "I know what I am doing. You had best walk along quietly if you know when you are well off."

"I will do nothing of the kind. By what right do you assault me?"

"By this right," said the other, displaying the brass star of a policeman. "And by this right," showing a pistol.

"You are making a grand mistake, my friend," said the burglar, quietly. "I can soon satisfy you who I am."

"Come along now, and save your breath," said the officer, sternly. "You can explain to the alderman to-morrow who you are. I know what I am doing, and am going to put you in safe keeping for tonight."

The other continued his remonstrances, but was forced along by the officer, who still held him by the shoulder, and refused to make any further reply to his remarks.

As they neared the station-house, the prisoner said:

"This mistake of yours is very annoying to me. I would rather spend considerable money than be disgraced by being locked up in a cell. I will make it worth your while to let me go."

"I have been a policeman five years and have not been bought yet," was the indignant rejoinder. "You can't buy me. Another thing, don't think that I am arresting you at a venture. I know just who you are and what you have been at to-night. I have been on the watch for you since dark."

The prisoner, with a sudden, deep pallor, looked nervously around. He seemed inclined to attempt an escape. But his vigilant captor was too wide awake for that. In five minutes he had him within

the strong walls of the station-house, and safely locked up in a cell.

"That's one of them bagged," he said.

Daylight was faintly showing in the east, and the occasional rumble of wagons had been for some time audible in the streets, when a light team stopped at the rear of Brown and Felger's.

For ten minutes the driver, and the two persons inside this establishment, were busy in removing rolls of goods to the wagon.

Then the door was closed, a key turned in it, and the driver and one of the burglars entered the wagon, which drove away.

The bearer of the key moved hastily from the locality, in the opposite direction.

But their retreat was not effected so easily as they had anticipated. The pedestrian met the fate of his earlier companion, by feeling a hand upon his shoulder, hearing a voice at his ear.

The men in the wagon tried to ride over the officer, who suddenly clutched their horse by the head. But he held on vigorously, and two more strong policemen sprung into the wagon, making them prisoners.

Inside of half an hour the three men were locked up in the same station-house which had been graced by their comrade for several hours. The wagon, with its spoils, was drawn into the yard of the police head-quarters.

Mr. Leonard was at once sent for, as also the members of the firm of Brown and Felger. They had been on the alert, and were at the station-house before seven o'clock.

"Have you any witnesses whom you desire to present before we hear these prisoners?" asked the police magistrate in attendance.

"Here is my principal witness," said Mr. Leonard, as Will came in with his usual easy swagger. "The officers who made these arrests are also important witnesses. I would like to have Mr. Wilson here, if we have time to send for him."

"I have thought of that," said the alderman, smiling. "Mr. Wilson will be here."

A grin of delight came upon Will's face at these words.

"We had better proceed, then," said Mr. Brown.

"Officer, bring up the prisoners."

In a few minutes the four men so lately captured were ushered into the room.

"Mr. Wilson!" cried Mr. Leonard, in utter astonishment, as he gazed on the pallid face of his confidential clerk, foremost among the prisoners.

"Jesse Powers!" cried Messrs. Brown and Felger, in a breath, and with equal astonishment.

"Black-eyed Joe, the grog-shop keeper, and Tom Quinn, one of the worst burglars in town," cried Will. "It's a pretty good haul."

"But what does this mean?" asked the merchant, in a breath. "There is some mistake here."

"There isn't as much mistake about it as you could cover with your little finger," said Will, pointing to the shrinking figures of the prisoners. "I could have told you three weeks ago that Gus Wilson was the man who was going through you. I have these other chaps nailed, too. There's more of the party yet."

"This is an astonishing," said Mr. Leonard. "I trusted that man as I trusted myself."

"They were taken in the act," said the officer.

Mr. Fitter now made his appearance, as also Will's friend, Joe the bootblack, whom he had notified to be present.

The magistrate proceeded to take evidence against the prisoners, but contented himself with that of the officers who had captured them, of Will, who recognized them as the men he had seen in the cellar, and the silent testimony of the rolls of cloth, which were brought into the room and identified by Mr. Leonard as his own property.

The four men were formally bound over for trial, and retired to their cells, glad to escape the fire of accusatory eyes. The sudden ending of their career of villainy was a terrible blow to the two principals in the robbery, as their pallid, haggard features testified.

"This evidence is very conclusive," said the magistrate, "so far as this single robbery is concerned. I presume you have other evidence relating to the past burglaries?"

"I have evidence that Jesse Powers was connected with the custom-house robbery, as also with forging my name at the bank," said Mr. Leonard. "Do you gentlemen recognize that handwriting?" he asked, handing the scrap of letter to his neighboring merchants.

"J. P." said Mr. Brown. "It is undoubtedly Jesse Powers. Who would have dreamed of that man being such a villain? I hope he has not been victimizing us in like manner."

"You are safe enough," said the detective. "He used your place as a safe passage-way for the removal of goods from Mr. Leonard's. He and Wilson between them have managed to remove those stones in the wall, and make an unsuspected passage. Is your lower cellar much used?"

"No, scarcely any," said Mr. Brown.

"They could easily then hide their work, by filling the cracks of the stones with dirt after each operation. I have seen the stones this morning. They are slanting and form a kind of dovetail into the wall. A wider stone above keeps the upper wall from falling."

"Could have told you their game a week ago," said Will, "only I wanted to nail them. I was locked into the cellar once before, the night I counted them Milton cloths. That's why I was so particular about counting. I seen some chaps at work that night. Followed them down stairs, but they gave me the slip before I could track them. Didn't want to say nothing till I had another show at them."

"It is a bad business about Mr. Elkton. I am very sorry that he was thrown into prison," said Mr. Leonard.

"He brought it all on himself by his obstinacy," said the detective. "I cannot understand now why he refused to explain his possession of that silk."

"He did it to screen his friend," replied Mr. Leonard. "It seems that this Jessie Powers saved his life once, and he would not inform on him. He sent a message to him to come to the prison, hoping to get an explanation of the matter, but Powers would not come."

"There is some gratitude left in the world, then," said the officer. "Elkton must be released at once, and an explanation of his conduct published to put him right with the public. I suppose that piece of silk was one of the samples they speak of having put out for the purpose of creating a demand for their stolen goods."

"They seem to have fallen into the wrong hands in this case," said the elder man. "But how about these silks? They have not yet been sold. They must be in some hiding-place of the burglars. You should know these men, Fitler, and know where to look for their plunder."

"I know that Quinn for a cracksman, but no where he is living. The other man is a new hand I will soon hunt them up."

"And meanwhile everything will disappear," said the alderman.

"Not if I know myself," cried Will. "I can save you a pint or two about that. If they want to save their plunder they'll have to shift it inside an hour."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"Come up here, Joe, and tell the gentlemen what you seen," said Will, dragging up his bashful associate. "Him and me smelt out Black-eyed Joe's, and nailed the rascals right at head-quarters. Don't be afraid, Joe. Tell the gentlemen what you seen."

Joe, thus requested, began a long, rambling description of how Will had come to him in the square. He detailed their talk, and went with great prolixity through the whole story, till the time they discovered the burglars in council. Will helped him with suggestions here and there, and managed to dovetail his own story into that of his associate.

"This is a mighty important business," cried Mr. Fitler, starting up. "You boys are worth your weight in gold. We must investigate this house at once. Can you point it out?"

"Yes, with my eyes shut."

"Take a squad, Mr. Fitler, and go down and make a thorough search of the place," said the alderman, rapidly writing. "Here is your warrant. Don't leave a rat-hole unsearched."

"If there are any stolen goods there I will bring them," said Mr. Fitler, confidently. "Come, boys, I will want you."

"Within the next hour a squad of policemen marched into and took forcible possession of Black-eyed Joe's mansion."

The search instantly commenced, and was speedily successful. In one of the upper rooms was a specially constructed, deep and wide closet. The door of this being forced it was found to be packed full of goods, among which Mr. Leonard's silks were prominent.

The latter was sent for, and identified nearly all the goods in the closet as his property, the proceeds of robberies that had gone on for over a year.

Wagons were produced and the goods sent to his store. Then, under the leadership of the bootblack, Mr. Fitler proceeded to the lurking place of the remaining burglar, whom he succeeded in arresting.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LOST FOUND.

ALL the members of the council which the two boys had seen at Black-eyed Joe's were now in custody. These consisted, as the reader may have guessed, of the two professional burglars, and Messrs. Wilson and Powers, who were the persons whom Will had recognized at the time.

Will had now given up his old residence, and was regularly located at the residence of his new-found father. The old gentleman was exceedingly happy in the possession of this strong, handsome lad for his son, and doted upon him with an affection which Will, in good measure, returned.

He made himself as much at home in this well-appointed residence as he had ever been in his less savory dwelling-places, and adopted the manners and customs of good society with a readiness which could hardly have been expected.

It would not be easy, however, to cure him of his assurance, and his rude, reckless habits of speech; all that could be done would be to confine them within more decorous limits.

He told his father with much vim of the morning's events, the arrest of the burglars, and the part he had taken in it.

The old gentleman was delighted with the courage and shrewdness of his son, and shuddered as he heard of the perilous adventure in the dark cellar. Will painted his enterprise in no mild colors.

"And now, my dear son," said Mr. Somers, "since you have so successfully finished your enterprise, I wish you to help me carry out my plans."

"Depends on what they are," said Will.

"I refer to your going to school. You are young enough yet to learn a business, and much as I like to part with you I must give you the benefit of an education."

"Ain't no use to part with me. There's good enough schools here," said Will. "Jist to think of a feller of my size goin' along the street with baby-school-books under my arm."

Will burst into a laugh at the absurdity of the thought.

"That is true, Will," said the old gentleman,

thoughtfully. "I would hardly like to subject you to the unpleasantness of going to a primary school. I will have to get you a private tutor, till you are somewhat advanced."

"Suit yourself. It don't make any difference to me," said Will, carelessly. "Never was ashamed of anything honest. And if anybody tried to poke fun at me I'd soon curry them down. I ain't afraid it'd last long. Kind of hate to leave the store, but I do want to learn something. Can't get myself on a level with other folks cept by learning."

"You are right, Will. I am glad to see that you take such a sensible view of the case. I will at once provide you with a tutor."

"What am I expected to do? To kick him if I don't like him?"

"He will be a gentleman and must be treated as such."

"All right! I just wanted to know what folks generally did with such. Didn't want to be out of fashion," said Will, laughing.

"You are incorrigible, Will," said the old gentleman, gazing fondly upon his handsome son.

"I don't lay myself out for a smooth board, easy planed," said Will. "I'm full of knots, and ain't going to be shaped so easy. I've got another job to put through yet afore I tie myself down to schooling."

"What do you mean?" asked his father, anxious to know what new whim had seized him.

"Want to find my little lost sister. Poor Jennie is just like me, kicked somewhere about this big town, m goin' to scour the whole city for her. Bet I now her if I set eyes on her."

"I earnestly hope you may succeed," said his father. "I will lend you every aid in that search. intend to go to the alms-house this very day, and if any trace can be found there."

"I want you to come with me, first, to Mr. Leonard's store," said Will. "It's about time we was ellin' him of our plans."

A hour later found them in Mr. Leonard's private office. Mr. Fitler was present, and there had been a long debate on the subject of the robbery.

The merchant had been apprised of Will's good fortune, and met his father with much pleasure.

"I hope you intend to let Will continue with me," he said. "He is going to make a good business man, and I should be sorry to lose him."

"I may let him return to you in the end," said Mr. Somers. "At present I feel it necessary to give him an education."

"I cannot object to that," said Mr. Leonard.

"I want to find my lost sister, Jennie, afore I strike into anything else," said Will.

"Jennie. Was that her name?" asked Mr. Leonard, curiously.

"Yes," said Mr. Somers. "The villain who carried off my children seems to have made no effort to change their names. He seems to have trusted to the distance he brought them to hide them from me."

"I have made inquiries at the alms-house," said Mr. Fitler, "as I promised you to do. They have a record there of the admission of two children, William and Jennie Somers, with date given. There is only one other record about them. Will ran away a few years afterward."

"And Jennie?" asked Will, laughing at the thought of his early exploit. "She was took out, and I couldn't stay without her."

"Yes, she was taken out," continued the detective. "By whom, I could not learn. She was adopted by a party who refused to let his name go upon the record. He wished to hide all trace of her origin."

"But the date is there," said Mr. Leonard, in some excitement. "What date is given?"

"The 3d of September, 18—"

The merchant hastily rose and seized his hat.

"Come with me," he said, briefly.

He led the way through the store and into the street at a rapid pace, giving no intimation of his object, but evidently in a state of growing excitement.

He continued at this pace for a considerable distance through the streets, finally stopping before a private house in a fashionable locality.

Ringing the bell with a nervous pull they were speedily admitted into the house.

Mr. Leonard had asked to see Miss Arlington, and they were ushered into the parlor, while the servant went for the lady.

In a minute she returned, and Miss Arlington was ushered into their presence. She was pale and haggard looking, and had evidently suffered much from the revelation which her guardian had made her.

She looked in surprise upon the party who had called to see her. Two of them, at least, were utter strangers, and she could not conjecture the object of this visit.

"We have called," said Mr. Leonard, "on important business. But first let me introduce you to Mr. Fitler and Mr. Somers."

"Mr. Somers," she repeated, looking from him to Will who sat beside him.

"I told you once that I had lost my parents," said Will, "or they had lost me, which comes to the same thing. I have found my father."

"And I have found my son," said Mr. Somers, looking proudly on his boy. "Were but my daughter returned to me, my cup of happiness would be full."

"I congratulate you both on your good fortune," said Jennie, with much interest. "I am sure you will have reason to be proud of my young friend, Will."

"I have no doubt of that," said the happy father.

"I have," said Will. "Folks, so far, ain't felt overly proud of me."

"But you wished to see me on business," she said, turning to her guardian.

"Yes," he replied, "in reference to the matter I mentioned to you at our last meeting."

A look of deep displeasure came upon her face.

"Let that matter die," she said briefly. "It is enough to have told it to me. Do you wish to publish it to the world?"

"It need not go beyond the parties present."

"And why so far as that?" she sharply asked.

"What is it their affair? I can see no necessity of this."

"I will tell you why, Jennie. I have learned something important connected with you, since I saw you last. It is necessary to broach it before these gentlemen, who are already conversant with the facts."

"I can see no such necessity, and must decline having my affairs publicly canvassed," she coldly replied.

Mr. Somers was involuntarily leaning forward in his seat, and devouring the face of the young lady with hungry, eager eyes. He seemed to forget all present in his absorbing interest.

"Listen, then, to another story," said Mr. Leonard, quietly.

"Mr. Somers here has had in his life experience the greatest misfortunes. He is a gentleman of great wealth, and surrounded with all that generally makes life desirable. Yet with it all he has been very unhappy. His wife died; his two children, a boy and a girl, were stolen from him by an enemy; his whole life has been devoted to the finding of these lost treasures."

"I am glad to see that he has partly succeeded," said Jennie, looking with new feeling into the handsome, cultured face of the old gentleman.

Mr. Somers had broken from his rapt regard of her features, on attention being directed to him.

"We have just learned," continued Mr. Leonard, "that the villain who carried off the children left them in the alms-house here in Philadelphia—dying there himself."

A quick thought flashed across Jennie's mind. She grew pale, and sunk back in her chair. She was beginning to guess the object of this revelation.

"They were left there under their own names, William and Jennie Somers," continued Mr. Leonard, fixing his eyes upon his intently listening ward.

"The life there did not please young Will. He took occasion, after losing his sister, to run away from the institution. He is now before you."

"After losing his sister?" she repeated, abstractedly, a feeling she had never before experienced coming upon her as she continued to gaze at Mr. Somers.

"Yes. The sister was removed from the institution, on the 3d of September, 18—, by a gentleman, who was attracted by her beautiful face and charming manners. He adopted her as his daughter, giving her his name, and concealing the facts of her origin."

"Yes," said Jennie, listening to his words with breathless interest.

"On the 3d of September, 18—, continued Mr. Leonard, "a friend of mine, Mr. James Arlington, adopted from the alms-house a young child, giving her his own name of Arlington, but retaining her original name of Jennie Somers. She is now known, in her full name, as Jennie Somers Arlington, and is the heiress to Mr. Arlington's estate, I being her guardian."

Mr. Somers had risen and approached Jennie with a motion as if drawn by some unseen force.

"Can this be possible?" she murmured, resting with one hand upon her chair, which shook with nervous emotion. "Mr. Arlington not my father! This gentleman my father!"

"Yes, she is my daughter—my Jennie!" he cried. "I know her now, her face, her eyes! She is the image of her poor mother!"

He would have clasped her in his arms, but she held him off, while her large, eager eyes averted with devolving intentness upon his face, as if not quite believing in this sudden revelation, yet drawn toward him and longing for his love.

Will, with his usual impulsiveness, broke the suspense.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he shouted. "I knowed you was my Jennie! Felt it in my bones. My dear, sweet, lost sister Jennie!"

Clasping her in his arms with a bear-like hug, he kissed her with a boy's earnest though boisterous affection, his whole face thrilled with love for his new-found sister.

"This is our father, Jennie—yours and mine," said Will, pushing her into the old man's arms. "Don't be doubting that. There ain't such another nice old father in Philadelphia."

She yielded to the old man's embrace, tears springing to her eyes as she felt his gentle kiss upon her lips.

"I have never had father or mother," she murmured. "Mr. Arlington was kind to me, but he never seemed to me like my real father. I know why now. I feel it in my heart that I have at last found my own father."

The warmest congratulations followed. Mr. Leonard was quite forgiven in the joy of this moment, and she turned to him with all her old impulsive affection.

"You only want John Elkton to make you perfectly happy," he said, smiling. "He is out of prison now, and I suppose is hunting this town over for his betrothed."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

A LONG and confidential interview ensued between the father and his two newly-discovered children. It was not easy for Jennie to take in the fact of her new relations. Such a sudden and surprising reversion.

lation naturally troubled her, and it was only by degrees that the last lingering doubts faded from her mind.

There was something very gentle and lovable about the old man, and she felt herself strongly drawn toward him. To Will, also, she had felt from the first a sense of attraction, which had caused her to like him despite his rudeness.

Gradually the belief strengthened upon her that this was indeed her father and her brother, and she grew very happy as she sat listening to the old man's story of his past life, and remembrances of their dead mother.

Only one lingering uneasiness dwelt upon her mind, and that was dispelled. A ring at the door, an announcement of a gentleman to see her, and she was ushered into the presence, and clasped in the embrace of John Elkton.

"Let me congratulate you, dear Jennie," he said. "I have met Mr. Leonard. He has told me of the surprising change in your relations. I am glad to learn that you have found a new father."

"Is it not strange, John?" she murmured, yielding to his caresses; "and so sudden. I have hardly got accustomed to the thought yet, though I am growing to love him. You know all?"

A shadow of doubt as to how he would view her alms-house experience came upon her.

"I know all," he replied. "You are from the alms-house and I from the prison. If there is any disgrace attaches to either of us it is to me."

"No, indeed, you brave, noble fellow," she cried, warmly kissing him. "I love you for what you did. Every one will respect you that you were willing to suffer for your friend."

"How was it all found out?"

"I discovered it," she answered.

"You?"

"Yes. On my visit to the prison I learned that Jesse Powers was the man who gave you the silk."

"I certainly told you nothing of the kind!" he exclaimed.

"No, but I found it out. I am a better detective than you think," she said laughing. "Sit down here and I will tell you all about it."

John was surprised and laughed at her shrewdness, as she told how she had arrived at his concealed knowledge, and described her interview with his false friend.

"I have not been very much deceived in Jesse Powers," he said. "But I felt that it was not for me to expose him. I owe him a debt which honor forced me to repay in the way I did."

"It was a noble action," she replied.

A half-hour afterward the two happy lovers sought the presence of the father and brother, who were still where Jennie had left them.

It was an embarrassing task for Jennie to introduce her lover to a father who was almost a stranger, although she had felt toward him the impulses of natural love.

But Will took all the trouble of the introduction off of her hands.

"Ha! I've caught you now, Jennie," he cried, with a quizzical laugh. "This is the young man that I wanted you to throw overboard. Father, this is our Jennie's beau, and a first-rate fellow, you can bet!"

Mr. Somers looked with some doubt from one to the other.

"Will is right," said Jennie, in a low tone, and deeply blushing. "Mr. Elkton and I have been engaged for some time. I wish now to present him to my new father."

"And I hope he may prove a dutiful son," said Elkton, as he warmly grasped Mr. Somers's extended hand. "I love your daughter so well, sir, that I cannot but transfer part of my affection to her father."

"I do not know you," said the father, with a happy smile, "but I trust in the choice of my daughter, and in the discretion of Mr. Leonard."

"And in Mr. Elkton's face," cried Will. "That's a passport to honesty."

"Thank you," said John, turning and offering his hand to the impulsive boy. "You have placed me under obligations to live out the promise of my face."

"Told Jennie once I was bound to cut you out," said Will. "Guess now though that I'll let you have her. She's a good girl. Make much of her."

"She is all the world to me," said John, turning and taking the hand of the blushing girl.

It was a happy family party which time and fortune had thus reunited, after a life of many vicissitudes, and it is time we should leave them, and seek other less happy inmates of our story.

The capture of the burglars was an event which produced a considerable sensation in police circles, and Mr. Fidler gained great praise for his shrewdness in working out this case. Of course Will's share in the business was credited to him, and quietly accepted.

A complete search of Black-Eyed Joe's domicile brought to light the fruits of other burglaries. It was evident that the thing had been of long continuance, the goods being gradually sold as fast as they could safely be put on the market. The goods had been sold cheap on the pretense of being smuggled.

The arrest of Augustus Wilson and Jesse Powers was a terrible blow to their friends. Mr. Leonard particularly was troubled in mind to think how implicitly he had trusted in this man, how terribly he had been deceived.

Strong efforts were made to procure their release on bail, but their employers brought all their influence to bear to negative this, fearing that they intended to escape, and being too indignant against them to allow them the opportunity.

Mr. Leonard deeply regretted his action in the arrest of John Elkton, and yet he could not see that he could have acted otherwise under the circumstances. The latter had certainly laid himself open to deep suspicion; no doubt from a noble motive. But noble motives are not appreciated till divulged.

The trial of the burglars came on in good time, and the evidence against them proved so strong and conclusive that but one verdict was possible.

It was proved conclusively that Jesse Powers was the active person in the plot, that the various specimens of handwriting shown in court were all his, and he was recognized as the person who had presented the forged check at bank, and the stolen order at the custom-house.

The assumption was that this had been removed by Wilson from the safe before his journey to Harrisburg, and passed over to Powers to operate with during his absence. Such a plan was well adapted to divert suspicion from the real burglars, and to make this theft appear the work of some other of Mr. Leonard's employees. There was no evidence to offer, however, on this point, except to show that there had been very slight opportunity for any one else to approach the safe.

The robberies were traced back, by a close examination of Mr. Leonard's books, for a period of a year and a half, thus fully exonerating Will Somers from any participation. Nothing had been taken from the store of Jesse Powers' employers.

The thieves had evidently feared to provoke an investigation here, since they could not get their booty to the street in the same mysterious mode in which it was taken from Mr. Leonard's store. There was evidence, too, that goods had been left concealed in this establishment on some occasions for several weeks before removal. The two main operators had then no connection with a receiver, and did not remove their spoils till they had effected a sale.

Evidence of the intimacy of Powers and Wilson was forthcoming, as also of their gradual falling into habits of gambling. Their losses in this direction seemed to have been the moving cause of their thefts, which grew more bold and frequent through impunity.

Finally they became so involved in gambling debts as to render necessary some more profitable robbery than any they had yet attempted. This resulted in their connection with a gang of professional burglars, and in the successful forgery and robbery which had been consummated.

Wilson's confidential intimacy with his employer kept him fully posted in all the purposes of the latter, and he knew just when and how to conduct his burglaries so as to divert suspicion from himself. Only Will Somers's suspicions of him, and strict charges of secrecy given Mr. Leonard, had enabled the officers to catch them in the act.

Will's evidence was the most direct and positive of any given in the court, and the deepest interest was manifested as he described his early suspicions of Wilson; his first night in the cellar, in which he had failed to discover the secret of the burglars' operations; the finding of the torn letter; and the ambuscade of himself and Joe the bootblack, in which he had positively recognized Powers and Wilson in the receiver's den. He finished with a clear description of his last night's adventures in the cellar.

His ragged friend, Joe, fully sustained that part of the evidence that related to the ambuscade; and positively recognized the four men in the dock as those who had been present on that occasion. He had a clear recollection of the scraps of conversation they had overheard from the burglars.

Other corroborative evidence was brought, finishing with the positive testimony of Mr. Fidler and the other officers, who had caught the prisoners in the very act of removing the stolen goods.

But one verdict could be given, despite the strong efforts of the defense, and the jury were not twenty minutes in forming a verdict of guilty.

With this verdict our story ends, so far as these characters are concerned. Severe sentences, ranging from six to twelve years at solitary imprisonment, were given by the judge, and they sunk from the surface of the living world into the slow death of a prison-cell.

All went well with those without.

Mr. Somers and his regained family were as happy as family could be, and Mr. Leonard was fully forgiven by Jennie for his somewhat selfish course in relation to herself and her lover.

This lover's attentions were more pressing than ever, and it was not long before a marriage ceremony broke the quiet of the Somers household, and Jennie again changed her name to Elkton.

Will gave up his position in the store to ragged Joe, whom Mr. Leonard accepted at his strong solicitation. He had a better opinion of street boys, too, than he had formerly entertained.

Will proved as energetic a student as he had been in his former avocations, and made immense progress under his tutor, and at the schools which he afterward attended.

His school intercourse, too, brushed off the rudeness of his demeanor and gave his manners a new polish; a result greatly assisted by the example and lessons of his sister, who did her best to make a gentleman of her roughly-trained brother.

Fortunately Will had good sense enough to perceive the value of her advice, and to profit by it. On leaving school he went into the same business in which he had received a partial training under Mr. Leonard, and by his energy and business ability soon made himself independent of his father's assistance.

No one would now recognize in William Somers, the successful merchant, him whom we have so far known as Willful Will, the street boy.

THE END.

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